

WORK AND WIN

An Interesting Weekly for Young America.

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FRED FEARNOT IN THE GOLD FIELDS; OR, EXPOSING THE CLAIM "SALTERS".

By HAL STANDISH.



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FRED FEARNOT IN THE GOLD FIELDS;

OR,

Exposing the Claim "Salters."

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CHAPTER I.

FRED AND TERRY CALLED WEST AGAIN.

Whilst Fred Fearnot was down in New York City attending to some special business and looking after the welfare of his little friend, the newsboy, whom he had characterized as a hero in rags, he received a letter from Terry Olcott at New Era which interested him very much:

It ran thus:

"My Dear Fred—You haven't forgotten our old friend Tom, whom we left on a sheep ranch out in Arizona. I have a letter from him, and he has got the gold fever badly. He says that some rich gold fields have been found within fifty miles of his place, and he wants to know if you and I can come out there and take a chance with him. He says that his sheep ranch is doing finely, and that his neighbors

have decided to let him raise all the sheep that he wants to. He has some good men to run the ranch for him, so that he can devote his time to digging for some of the yellow metal. What's the matter with our going out there? We've both been leading rather uneventful lives since we came East. Let that boy's mother take care of him and run him and the boarding-house, too, whilst we take a jaunt out to Tom's sheep ranch.

"Yours till death,

"TERRY."

Fred folded up the letter, placed it in his pocket and then began doing some pretty hard thinking.

Hunting for gold had an almost irresistible fascination for him, and he knew that it was the same with Terry.

While he had made a lot of money down in Wall street, it was exceedingly dull work. Most of the brokers were afraid of him.

Kennedy had frequently told him so. They believed that he was a man born lucky, and that the majority of brokers were afraid of all such operators.

He had turned his office down in Wall street over to young Phil Morris, for whom Kennedy agreed to be responsible.

He paid the rent for young Phil, who was engaged in selling tips on shares; Phil himself furnishing the money.

He sat down and dropped a note to Terry, saying:

"I'll be up in a few days."

Those few days were devoted to winding up what little business was left on his hands.

Then he took the train for New Era, but stopped over at Fredonia to see his friends there.

He said nothing, however, to Evelyn or anyone else there of his and Terry's contemplated trip West.

He took them by surprise.

Of course, the Olcott family gave him the usual welcome.

Evelyn, after shaking hands with him and letting him snatch a kiss from her, felt his pulse like a doctor, and asked him to poke out his tongue.

He did so, and she laughingly remarked:

"You've got the Western fever, Fred, and the only remedy for it is a trip out somewhere beyond the Mississippi."

It staggered him for a few moments, and he suspected that Terry had written either her or Mary Hamilton something about Tom's letter to him.

But Terry had done nothing of the kind.

Evelyn simply suspected it.

"Well, Doc," he finally replied, "do you recommend me to take a trip West?"

"No; I'm not in practice now, and I am not licensed. I simply tell you the symptoms."

"Well, perhaps the change of air from the city to New Era will disperse those symptoms, dear."

"Well, if so, it will be the first time. But go ahead. Maybe you'll be cured of it after awhile, at least I hope so."

"So do I, dear; but if you think I ought not to go I'll follow your prescription most implicitly."

"Fred, I won't do anything of the kind. If you wish to go out West and enjoy yourself, go ahead, and take my blessing with you."

He laughed and changed the conversation by beginning to empty his pockets of the candies and nuts he had brought up for the children.

Evelyn and her mother interfered, of course, knowing if they were turned loose on the supply of sweetmeats a doctor would have to be sent for the next day, so each child was given just as much, and no more, than was good for them.

He spent the day and night there, not once leaving the place to go down into the town.

Of course, Evelyn sent down for Mary, who came over and spent the greater part of the evening with her.

He had many things to tell them, and Mary had many messages to send to Terry.

"Mary," said Evelyn, "Fred has the Western fever, and the next we'll hear of him and brother will be from some point beyond the Mississippi."

"I've been expecting that for several weeks now," remarked Mary, "but Terry hasn't hinted anything about it in his letters to me."

"No; nor has Fred to me, either; but I can feel it in his pulse and by looking at his tongue."

Mary and Fred laughed heartily.

The next day Evelyn and Mary, in the Olcott carriage accompanied him over to the railroad station and saw him off for New Era.

He begged them both to go up and see if Terry had the Western fever, too; but they shook their heads, saw him enter the train, and then they returned home.

When he reached New Era, Terry was at the station waiting for him, and before they reached the cottage he had repeated the contents of Tom's letter to him.

"Well, what do you think of it, Terry?" Fred asked.

"Well, I think we had better go out and look around and see what the prospects are. We are doing nothing now, and what is coming to us will come to us anyhow, and Dick and Joe will look after it. How much did you make down in Wall street?"

"Terry, I haven't counted it up, but I'm considerably ahead."

"All right. You've made more out West than you have here, and, besides, we've had some pretty lively adventures."

"Yes, and some pretty close calls too, Terry."

"All right, but we both have whole skins yet. Those new diggings may have big fortunes for somebody, and perhaps we may have our usual good luck."

"Yes! Yes! We've been for a year now leading very quiet lives with the exception of the rackets we had out in Colorado helping out the girl ranch owner. By the way, Terry, let's go out by way of our ranch."

"All right. I don't care how we get there, so long as we reach the riggings. It isn't necessary for us to buy any more clothes for the mining region, as we have plenty out there with Wicklow."

"Yes. Very true. When do you want to start?"

"Right now. We can take the next train."

"Great Scott! You've got it bad." Then Fred told him how Evelyn had felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and said he had the Western fever, and that he might be cured by taking another visit beyond the Mississippi.

Terry smiled and remarked:

"Fred, she is the sharpest girl in this state."

"She is all that, old man, but we won't take the next train. I want to see Sallie Mason and her husband and have a talk with Amalie, who may want to send messages and something substantial to her people. Neither of them would forgive us if we slipped off without letting them know that we were going so close to their places."

"Yes. That is true. Sallie and Jim are yet the happiest couple you ever saw. They have moved into their new residence, which Margie and Amalie helped them to furnish. Sallie, of course, is the proudest girl in New Era. They are looking for her sister Lena very early in the spring."

"Well, where can we find her now?"

"Why, at her home, of course!"

"Well, we will go up there after supper."

By that time they had reached the Fearnot cottage, and found Amalie and Margie busy in their homes attending to household duties.

Both the girls gave them a hearty welcome.

Then they went up to the company's office, and found that Joe and Dick had everything going along smoothly.

"What luck did you have in Wall Street, Fred?" Dick inquired.

"Pretty fair. I came out ahead."

"Well, how is your newsboy friend getting along?"

"He is doing well, going to school."

"That boy has a most tremendous ambition, and mark what I tell you: he is going to make something of himself. I feel sure that my investment in him will be about one of the best I ever made in that line."

"Well, that is good news. How long are you going to stop here now?"

"That is a very pointed question, Dick. Terry and I have some news from Colorado. We may go out to the ranch tomorrow."

"Well, traveling nowadays isn't at all unpleasant. There are splendid roads from here to Chicago and from there down to Ranchman's Rest."

"What's the trouble out at the ranch?" Joe inquired.

"No trouble at all, but simply we have heard of a good business chance for us out there, and we are going to see about it."

"You are not going to see the girl ranch owner, though, are you?"

"No, not purposely; but we may see her before we come back."

"Well, you'll go across the river to see Amalie's folks, won't you?"

"Of course! I wouldn't think of going so near without stopping over to see them. Tell Amalie that she must hustle if she wants to send out anything to her mother."

"All right," and Joe went to the telephone, called up Amalie at the cottage, and told her that Fred and Terry were going out to the ranch the next day, and if she wanted to send anything to her parents, to hustle and get it all ready.

Just then Jim Mason, who had married Sallie Porter, the old tavern-keeper's daughter at Ranchman's Rest, gave them both a noisy welcome, and when he was told that they were going to Ranchman's Rest the next day, he said he would go back and tell Sallie about it.

"All right," said Terry. "If she wants to send anything out to the old folks and her sister we will take it with pleasure."

Before the sun went down that day Amalie and Sallie had a number of presents for them to take along with them. Sallie sent no end of messages to the effect that she was just the happiest girl alive, and was anxiously waiting for her sister, Lena, to come out early in the spring.

The presents they sent out required a good-sized valise

to carry them, so when Fred and Terry went up to the train the next day, the ladies accompanied them.

Of course, Margie and Amalie were eager to find out what the business was that was taking them out there.

Fred told them that some new gold fields had been discovered, and they were going out to see what the chances were of getting some of the yellow metal.

Three days later they reached the old tavern at Ranchman's Rest.

Nobody there was expecting them.

They managed to enter the hotel before their presence in the place was known by anybody in the old tavern.

Lena and her mother rushed at them and gave them the usual welcome, and, of course, the first question from each in the house was:

"How did you leave Sallie and Jim?"

"Happy as two crickets," replied Terry. "They haven't got over the silly period of married life yet. It would actually tickle you to hear them talking; it is dear this and sweetheart that, and they don't care, either, who hears them billing and cooing. I thought Sallie had long passed all such things."

"Well, she is happy," said her mother. "That is all I wish to know."

"Well, she is happy if ever a girl was. Jim lets her have all the money she needs, but she has learned how to be economical under your and her father's training. And, Lena, she is eagerly waiting to welcome you to her home. She says she has half a dozen young men picked out for you to make a choice from for a husband."

"Do you know any of them?" Lena asked, her pretty face flushing.

"Yes, I know several of them, and they are all right. You want to be careful, though, and find out all about a fellow before you fall in love with him."

"Fred Fearnot," said Mrs. Porter, "I can hardly find it in my heart to forgive you and Terry for taking my two girls away from me. They may be very happy in this new home, but the thought that they are two thousand miles away from me makes me feel as though I could never stand it. They have been with me ever since they were born, and were a great comfort to me all the time."

"Mother Porter, don't you worry about your girls. They can't stay with you all their lives. They are entitled to, and, of course, expect to have homes of their own sometime."

"Yes, of course. But they could get good homes out here."

"They'll come to see you regularly, and don't you forget it," remarked Terry, "and you must go out to see them. You've been working hard for many years right here in this tavern. You are entitled to a long vacation. I would advise you to go out next spring with Lena, and when the old man begins to kick about your staying so long, just write to him to sell out and come East. I know that you've been working harder than he has."

That evening Fred arranged with the old man to send

him and Terry out to the ranch in a wagon, and the next morning they were off, after an early breakfast.

Of course, Wicklow and his family were surprised at seeing them.

They hadn't been at the ranch an hour before Fred and Terry had on their hunting-suits.

"Wicklow," Fred inquired, "how is Miss Loomis getting on with her ranch?"

"I believe she is doing well, sir; at least she is having no more such trouble as she was having when you were here last. She rode by here one day on her way down to Ranchman's Rest and stopped to shake hands with Mrs. Wicklow and to inquire after you and Mr. Terry, as well as the ladies. She is looking well, her cheeks are a mixture of red and brown. She takes a great deal of exercise on horseback, and never goes out of the house without a revolver in her belt."

"Well, are those cowboys she hired down at Ranchman's Rest behaving satisfactorily?"

"I've heard nothing to the contrary, sir. I know they all seem to feel quite proud of her, and there are two or three ranchmen who are trying to marry her, but she doesn't seem to be in the notion of marrying."

"Terry, we must take a run up there and see her."

"Yes, of course. But to-morrow we must go over the river to see the Snyders."

They visited everything of interest about the ranch that afternoon, and the next morning they drove over to the Snyder ranch to deliver to Amalie's mother the many presents sent her.

Rudolph and Elsie were still there.

The actress was now a most thorough-going ranch woman. She loved the wild, free life on the ranch, and she and Rudolph were as much in love with each other as they ever were.

Fred and Terry spent some four or five hours there, and after dinner returned to their own ranch, saying that they would call again before they went East.

The next day they mounted two of the best horses on the ranch and rode out to the old Craigie ranch.

Miss Loomis fairly screamed with delight when she saw them dismounting in front of the gate.

She ran out to greet them, and in her enthusiasm she threw her arms around their necks and kissed each one.

CHAPTER II.

FRED AND TERRY START FOR ARIZONA IN THEIR SADDLES.

The girl ranch owner called up two of her cowboys to take Fred's and Terry's horses, put them in the stable and feed them well, after which she set the cook hustling to get up the best dinner that she could.

When her mother, Mrs. Loomis, came into the sitting-room to greet them they both noticed she had greatly improved in health.

"Well, well, well!" ejaculated Fred. "Ranch life certainly agrees with you, Mrs. Loomis."

"Yes," she replied, "I think I've gained some six or eight pounds since I saw you last. I was by no means a well woman when I came out here, but the air, the water and the way of living seems to agree with me, for I certainly was never in such health as I am now. As for Vinnie, she is positively growing rough and stout. I'm afraid if we were to go back to our former home all of her old friends would be shocked at her boisterousness. She can whoop and yell as loud as any cowboy on the place. When I chide her she simply laughs at me. She has half a dozen suits of men's clothes, and when she has any distance to ride she dons one of them, mounts the horse like a man and dashes off with a real cowboy yell. Really I'm shocked at her myself."

The young ranch girl laughed heartily and remarked:

"I am simply adapting myself to my environment. In wet weather I wear a pair of big boots that come up above my knees. When I go out hunting, which I frequently do, in quest of quail or prairie hens, of which I am very fond, skirts are a nuisance."

"I should think they would be," said Terry.

"I can assure you that they are," she replied. "But no matter where I go or how I am dressed, every man I meet treats me respectfully, like a lady. I'm afraid I have an extremely bad reputation among them as a girl who is very dangerous to fool with. Since you were here I've had a piano sent out from the East. And, oh my! such a time as we had in getting it set up in the house!"

"Good! Good! That shows that, notwithstanding you are running a ranch, you are also a true woman. You like music."

"Indeed I do! When I come in from a ride over the range I go up to my room, put on my dress, and then, if I feel like it, I sing and play until I am satisfied. Now, they tell me down at your ranch that both you and Mr. Oleott are fine musicians. And before you return you must let me hear both of you sing and play. I've been so glad to see you I didn't think to ask after the girls. How did you leave them all?"

"Every one of them well," replied Fred. "They are all wishing that you will be able to come out next summer and spend at least a month with them as their guest at New Era, and to that Terry and I both add our own entreaties that you will do so. I don't think that a girl rancher has ever been seen out there. You would create a most decided sensation."

She laughed and said:

"Yes! And everybody would call me Tom-boy. They would laugh at what they would call my oddities."

"Don't you believe it," said Fred. "We have seen quite a number of young ladies from the West out there, born on the ranches, and except for a little breezy way of enjoying themselves, they are not different from the other girls around. But now, tell me, how have you been getting on since we left? Have you had any more trouble with cattle thieves?"

"No, sir. There hasn't been half a dozen cattle stolen since you left. It was the cowboys on the ranch that helped them do the stealing. The cowboys now all have Winchesters the same as yours, and they will shoot, too. Since you left here they have let me severely alone. When I give an order it is obeyed promptly, and, what is more, the men seem to be proud of attending to business just as I wish to have them do. I have followed your advice, and that is to feed the men well and keep them satisfied. This summer I am going to have about twenty acres of land cultivated for vegetable supplies for them. After awhile I want you to go out into the barnlot and see what a big flock of fowls of all kinds I have. The place is literally over-run with quail and prairie hens. Whenever any of the cowboys find a prairie hen's nest he gathers in the eggs and brings them to us."

"Well, that is good news," said Fred. "They've got confidence in you, and your showing confidence in them has a good effect."

"Yes, I think so. I am more than ever pleased with living on the ranch, but I have very little company. Sometimes a ranchman will drive up in a wagon with his whole family and spend the day with me, and we entertain them the best we can. One day two of the cowboys came up to the house and said there was a pack of wolves in the timber prowling around after the calves. I mounted my horse and shouldered a Winchester rifle and they went with me. I have become a mighty good shot, I am proud to say, and when a wolf is seen the cowboys always give me the first shot at it. I dropped four of them that day, and it really made me blush to hear the men brag about my marksmanship. I felt proud of it myself."

Then she opened the piano and asked Fred to sing something for her and her mother, and he and Terry played and sang until the cook announced that dinner was ready.

Mrs. Loomis and her daughter several times expressed regret that Evelyn and Mary had not come out with them.

"How long are you going to stay out West?" the daughter asked.

"Well, we are going out into Arizona. We have a friend who has a sheep ranch out there, and he writes us that new gold fields have been found about fifty miles west of his place."

"Oh, dear! And so you are going to mining?"

"Well, I don't know yet! We are simply looking around to see if we can find good paydirt."

"Why, do you know anything about mining?"

"Yes, we have worked in both gold and silver mines, but we have made most money by urging and selling claims. Besides, there are always some very lively adventures to be had in the mining regions."

"I should think so! You meet up with some of the worst men in the world in the mines, too, don't you?"

"Yes, I think we do. But we are never in the mining regions but a few days before those rough fellows learn to let us alone. There is always a lot of big bluffs among them who go about hunting for trouble. There is no

sheriff or court out there, you know, and if a man is hanged for crime it is done solely by lynching."

"Well, I hope nobody will find any gold near this place, for if a thousand or two rough miners took up their abode in this vicinity I believe I would buy a ranch somewhere else and drive all the cattle to it."

"Well, let me tell you something about miners, Miss Loomis. No matter how bad miners may be, the women are so scarce in the mining regions that they look upon them as angels. Everyone of them would stand ready to shoot and fight for you."

"Yes, but that is what I don't want any man to do. I'd rather be hundreds of miles away from them."

"Once out in Nevada in the diggings a theatrical company came along and, of course, every miner for ten miles around came to see the show. While the band was playing some woman with a baby in the house had a lot of trouble to keep the child quiet. A big, red-shirted fellow sprang to his feet and yelled out, 'Stop that band! Stop that band!' and, having a revolver in his hand, the musicians very promptly stopped playing and looked at him, and he said 'I want to hear that baby cry.'"

Mrs. Loomis and her daughter laughed heartily.

"There," said Fred, "was a good heart in the bosom of a bad man. He probably had a family out East somewhere, and the cries of the baby reminded him of his old home. The mother soon quieted the child, though, and the play went on."

After spending nearly the entire day there Fred and Terry shook hands with the mother and daughter and promised to see them again before they returned East, but on the following day they would start to the sheep ranch in Arizona.

The girl rancher was extremely sorry to see them leave.

She ordered her own horse to be saddled, and rode about five miles southward with them.

She claimed that they stood toward her in the light of a couple of brothers, and she not only felt grateful to them, but said that she loved them as if they were really her own brothers.

"You express my sentiments exactly," said Fred. "I have but one sister, but really I feel as though you were a second one. I really hope that you will find it convenient for your mother and yourself to come out and spend a month with us at New Era next summer."

"I will if I can find it possible to do so," she replied, "but I have yet to find out which of my cowboys is the most capable of running the ranch in my absence."

When she had gone five miles she stopped, shook hands with them again and stood gazing after them as long as they were in sight.

Then she turned her horse's head back toward the house, and all the way back the horse walked leisurely, and she was thinking how pleasant it would be for them to take up their residence at the ranch, and thus be able to visit her once a week.

Early the next morning, each mounted on one of the best horses on the ranch and carrying his faithful Winches-

ter, they started out for Arizona, making straight for Tom Mason's sheep ranch.

It was a long, long ride for them.

They could have struck the Southern Pacific railroad by riding southward a couple of days, but they wanted their faithful horses, and didn't want to take the chances of shipping them by rail, so they decided to ride through the country and live on such game as they could shoot.

Of course, they knew they could strike certain towns where they could find hotel accommodations, but they had their splendid Mexican blankets and each owned a lariat, with which they could stake their horses with the reasonable expectation of finding them ready the next morning.

Wicklow made the inquiry as to when he might expect them back again.

"Don't look for us until you see us," said Terry. "We have got to ride three or four hundred miles."

Wicklow whistled and remarked:

"That's a pretty long ride, Mr. Olcott, and it will go hard on your horses."

"Not a bit of it," said Fred. "We will take our time about it. It's the way we have of hunting on horseback. These horses will stand the report of our rifles from the saddles. They are well trained, and we don't intend to tax their strength at all."

With that they rode off, and all day long they passed through varied scenery conversing on whatever topic suggested itself.

They made it a rule, unless conditions changed, to make about forty miles a day.

A little before sunset they struck a ranch and applied for accommodations at the house.

The old ranchman's son recognized Fearnot, having seen him twice at Ranchman's Rest, and he told his father who he was.

"Tell 'em to dismount and stop over with us. They are both welcome."

"That's pleasant," said Fred. "I always like to meet up with acquaintances, though I can't say that I remember meeting you before."

"No, because I never spoke to you, but I saw you at Ranchman's Rest Tavern two years ago."

The young man gave his name, and both Fred and Terry remembered hearing the name mentioned several times by other ranchmen.

They knew a ranchman of that name was living out in that direction, so they sat up until nearly midnight talking to the old man and his son, whilst the old lady and two very pretty daughters sat up and listened to their talk.

The next morning they both offered pay for their entertainment, but the ranchman refused to take it. He told them that the latchstring was always on the outside for men of their stripe, and that he hoped to meet them again.

Just before they mounted their horses the old man's son told them that the region some thirty miles west of them was inhabited by some very rough characters, men whose reputations were very bad; but that he believed many of

them were simply cattle thieves and highwaymen, and that they should be careful where they put up the next night.

"Thank you! Thank you!" said Fred. "We don't wish to have trouble with anyone."

"That's a very clever family back there, Fred," said Terry, when they had ridden about a mile beyond the ranch.

"Yes, they seem to be all right. Those daughters are very pretty girls, and they seem to be very fond of their parents."

"Yes, I noticed that, and I'll wager something that they render good assistance when it comes to rounding up the cattle on the ranch."

"Yes, their faces showed plainly that they didn't mind the sun and the wind and the rain."

After they had traveled about thirty miles that day they struck a little hamlet of about fifteen or twenty houses.

There were a couple of stores and a bar-room.

They stopped at one of the stores and bought a lunch of cheese and crackers.

There were a lot of men around the bar-room drinking and carousing.

They could hear the men in the saloon as they sat eating their lunch in the store, scarcely a hundred yards away.

Finally Fred asked the storekeeper what was the occasion of the noise.

"Oh, it is just a lot of rough fellows drinking. They are in there every day. We have no such thing as a Sunday out here."

"Well, don't the men have any work to do?"

"Yes, they say they have; but all the same there is a lot of them around the saloons every day drinking some of the vilest whisky in the West."

"Don't they ever give you any trouble?"

The storekeeper shook his head and pointed to three Winchester rifles behind his counter.

He and his two clerks evidently thought they were sufficient to protect themselves.

They looked like men who would shoot, and shoot to kill, when it became necessary.

When they had finished their lunch which they had bought from the storekeeper, Terry noticed a half dozen men standing around and inspecting their horses.

They had dismounted without hitching them, because the well-trained animals would stay where they were left, but Terry thought he had better go out and see that they were not molested.

Finally one of the men, a big, red-shirted fellow, tried to mount Terry's horse.

"Mister," said Terry, "you had better let that horse alone. He belongs to me."

The fellow, with his left foot in the stirrup, looked at him as he stood in the door of the store and asked:

"Well, who do you belong to?"

"I guess I belong to myself, and maybe I belong to that horse. At any rate you don't want to go to fooling with him."

"Look here," said another one of the party, "you ain't mighty big for a little man."

Just then the big fellow flung himself into the saddle, and, looking at Terry, asked:

"Do you want to sell him?"

Terry, very coolly looking the man in the face, raised his Winchester and said:

"You want to get down, Mister, and do it in a hurry, too."

The fellow looked at the Winchester and very promptly dismounted, saying:

"Mister, I'd like to buy this horse."

"He is not for sale," said Terry, "for that would leave me on foot, and this is the last place on the American continent where I would like to be left afoot."

"Don't like the place, eh?"

"No, sir. I don't like any place where a stranger will come up and mount my horse as though he was his own property."

"Where's your pard, Mister?" another asked.

"He is back here in the store."

Just then Fred appeared at the door alongside of Terry with his Winchester in his hand.

The two splendid Mexican blankets that were strapped to the back of the saddle excited the cupidity of the men, several of whom went up and took hold of them, turned them as far as they could, and one of them said:

"Say, Mister, that is a fine blanket. What'll you take for it?"

"A thousand dollars couldn't buy it," said Terry.

CHAPTER III.

FRED AND TERRY'S LONG RIDE.

"What's that?" the fellow asked. "Do you mean it when you say that you wouldn't take a thousand dollars for that blanket?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. I'm going on a long trip, and that is the only blanket I have with me. Do I look like a fool, who would sell his blanket under such circumstances?"

"Oh, well, you can get cheaper blankets right there in the store."

"No doubt of that! But I guess I'm like you, I prefer a good blanket to a cheap one."

"I'll give you fifty dollars for it," said the man.

"I believe you," said Terry, "but you won't get it at any price."

The fellow began tugging at the blanket as though he was trying to pull it away from its fastenings.

Terry raised his Winchester and ordered him away from it.

"You wouldn't shoot a man for a blanket, would you?" the man asked.

"Yes, I would shoot a fellow for ten cents if I caught him trying to take that much away from me."

He kept tugging at the blanket, and Fred called out to him:

"Mister, you'd better let that blanket alone. My pard here won't stand any foolishness."

"Oh, I can lick him with one hand in my pocket," replied the fellow, evidently a big bluff, seeing that he had a crowd of half a dozen friends with him.

"I'll give you a chance to do that," said Terry, handing his gun to Fred.

He stepped down and walked straight up to the man and said:

"You can't lick me with both hands and both feet, and now you let go of that blanket."

The man gave a savage jerk at the blanket, and the next moment he found himself lying flat on his back wondering why it was that the stars were shining in the daylight.

He lay there fully a minute before he had consciousness to suggest that he get up on his feet again.

He finally rose to his feet and rushed savagely at Terry, but again he measured his full length on the bosom of Mother Earth.

As he came at Terry the third time Terry went at him like a shower of thunderbolts.

He not only knocked him down, but caught him by the collar of his shirt, raised him to his feet again and played a tattoo on the bosom of his shirt, and when he let go the fellow dropped to the ground unconscious.

The others stood around and made all sorts of remarks.

One of them was evidently preparing to open fire on Terry, but Fred covered him with his rifle, and suggested that he keep still and let his pard have a fair show.

Not one of the fellows had a Winchester with him, but each had a revolver.

They knew what a man could do with a Winchester fully charged; that not one of them would escape alive.

Finally a big fellow turned to Terry and remarked:

"Mister, let me see you do me that way."

"Really, do you want me to do you that way?"

"Yes, if you can. I never was licked in my life, and if you think you can do it, why, I'll really be thankful and treat the crowd to drinks."

"All right," said Terry, putting up his guard, and the next moment they both began sparring, but just two minutes was sufficient to force the man to admit that he was licked.

"Oh, you can't entertain a mouse!" said Terry. "You cry 'enough' before you are half licked. Stand up and put up the best that's in you."

There were others in the bar-room, who, when they heard a fight was going on in front of the store, rushed out to see it.

The fellow had no more fight left in him.

He had a revolver in his belt, but when he saw Fred standing with his Winchester ready to use it he dared not lay his hand on it.

Terry was very angry.

He looked around at the party and asked:

"Is there any other among you who wants to interfere with a couple of strangers?"

Not one made an answer.

The greatest bully always fears a man whose fighting abilities he has any knowledge of.

Terry had shown that he was able to take care of himself and didn't know what fear was.

"Hold on, Terry," said Fred. "You've got no time to waste here. We've a good many miles to make yet before sunset," and with that he handed Terry his rifle, and, going to his own horse, sprang to his saddle.

Several of the men called to them and asked them to stop and take a drink.

"Thank you," said Fred, "we never drink liquors, and if you fellows would stop drinking it you would be able to lick somebody who comes along."

Terry sprang into his saddle and both dashed away as though they were running a race.

The truth is, they thought some of the drunkest of the crowd might open fire on them with their revolvers and thus necessitate their returning the fire with their Winchester.

They were a couple of hundred yards away before any of the toughs thought of firing at them; then they heard two shots, and were out of range of the revolvers.

Just for fun, Terry turned and raised his rifle and aimed at them, and the men scattered like blackbirds. Some dashed into the store, some of them into the saloon and some around behind the house.

"Hold on, Terry!" said Fred. "Don't shoot!"

Terry laughed and said:

"Did you see the cowards scatter?"

"Yes," said Fred. "It would be murder to shoot cowards like they are."

Terry turned his horse's head again and trotted alongside of Fred, remarking:

"I guess this is the place the old ranchman's son warned us about this morning."

"Very likely."

"I'm quite sure of it," said Terry. "If we hadn't shown that we were not afraid of them they would have robbed us of everything we had with us."

In fifteen or twenty minutes they were out of sight of the little hamlet.

In a little while they struck a piece of timber and made their way through it for a couple of miles.

Then they struck an opening again, and, urging their horses into a pretty brisk trot, they soon placed a number of miles between them.

They were fully ten or twelve miles from the place when the twilight began settling upon the earth.

"Now, Fred," said Terry, "I guess we had better not start a fire. We had a good lunch at that store. If we start a light it may be that those men or some others may follow us up to get these horses and blankets and what money we have with us."

"Very true! We had better keep on, Terry, for I'm

inclined to think a few miles farther on we may strike a piece of timber."

"All right; come ahead," answered Terry, and they rode on a few miles farther, when they saw several lights ahead of them.

They had struck another ranchman's home.

There they hallooed, and a couple of cowboys came out in response to their call.

"Whose ranch is this?" Fred inquired.

"It's Gilmore's ranch, sir."

"Well, we are ranchmen ourselves. We live down near Ranchman's Rest, and are going westward to Arizona. We are willing to pay for accommodations for the night for ourselves and horses."

One of the cowboys turned back to the house and returned some few minutes later followed by the ranch owner, who came out to take a look at them.

They were suspicious of everybody who came along that way after sunset.

One of the cowboys came out with a lantern, and the ranchman, after looking at their faces and their horses, came to the conclusion that they were all right, and told them as they had blankets with them, they could put their horses into the horselot, where they would be well fed, and they could sleep on their blankets in the cowboys' quarters.

They both thanked him and promptly dismounted.

The cowboy turned their horses into the horselot, where the stable was nothing but a shed made of rough plank.

They were supplied with hay liberally, and Fred and Terry took their saddles off and carried them into the cowboys' quarters and sat down before a fire and began talking with them.

The cowboys were big, rough fellows, but were quite respectful.

They told of the little scrimmage they had at the hamlet, where they stopped at the store to have some rations, and they laughed and joked with each other and began guessing who the two men were who had tackled Terry.

"Mister," said one of them, "they are bad fellows over there. I never knew one of them to do an honest day's work in my life, and I've been living here on this ranch three years."

"Just what I thought," remarked Fred. "But how do they manage to live?"

"They don't have to make a living. They steal it."

"Do they get any of your cattle?"

"That I can't say, sir. Once in awhile we lose one. They always have money enough to get drunk on, and once in awhile a man is found dead near the village, and the supposition is that he was killed and then robbed. Last winter we caught two of them cutting out some of our cattle, but you can wager all you have that they never got a taste of the meat, nor did they ever sleep above the ground another night."

"That's the best remedy in the world for such villains," remarked Terry. "We had the same trouble with them two or three years ago down at the western end of the state,

and we could point out a dozen places where they took up permanent lodgings."

A little before midnight they spread their blankets on the floor and laid down on them, using their saddles for pillows.

They slept soundly till sunrise, then they arose, went out and looked after the feeding of their horses.

The ranchman came out into the horselot, and asked them how they managed to sleep during the night.

"Splendidly," said Fred. "We have slept on our blankets hundreds of times, I guess."

"Well, where are you fellows going?"

"Out to Arizona."

"Well, what's going on out there. If you are ranchmen, that is one of the worst places in the world to run that sort of business."

"We are not going out there to run a ranch. We own already one of the best ranches in the western part of this state. I guess we can count ten thousand head of cattle on it."

The ranchman's eyes opened wide, and he asked what his name was.

"My name is Fearnot, and this is my partner, Olcott."

The ranchman looked at them in astonishment, and said:

"Are you Fred Fearnot?"

"That's my name, sir."

"Well, I'm sorry you didn't tell me your name last night. I have heard of both of you. The sheriff who lives up at Hillsdale is a relative of mine, and he has told me a great deal about you."

"We are great friends," remarked Fred.

"Well, really, I owe you an apology. The fact is, we have so many bad men in this vicinity that I was suspicious of you last night, and was afraid to invite you into my house with my family."

"That's all right," said Fred. "We both understood that well enough, so no apology is necessary."

"Well, come in and have breakfast with us."

"No, thank you. We will eat jerked beef with the cowboys."

The ranchman swore they should do nothing of the kind, and with that he returned to the house and gave directions for some extra food to be cooked for breakfast, saying that the parties who slept in the cowboys' cabin were two of the wealthiest men in the state; that they were Fearnot and Olcott.

The wife and daughters hustled around and got up an extra breakfast, which Fred and Terry tried to get out of participating in.

Finally, though, they went in and were introduced to the wife and daughters, who, during the entire meal were apologizing for the mistake the old man had made.

"Ladies," said Fred, "don't mention it. We appreciate the situation, and we could but endorse his actions."

It was nearly noon before they could get away from that ranch, so determined were all the family to make amends for being relegated to the cowboys' cabin the night before.

They wouldn't let them pay a penny.

On the contrary, the wife cooked two chickens for them to take along as rations.

Fred tried to make her take a ten-dollar goldpiece for her kindness, but she flatly refused to take it, and urged them both to stop at the ranch with them on their return.

The old man warned them that for a hundred miles west of them they would have to go through some very bad settlements. Disreputable characters were scattered all along through that region. They were more given to horse stealing than to stealing cattle.

"We have been through a part of that region," said Fred, "and we had trouble with horse thieves, but they suffered a good deal more than we did."

They finally got away, after shaking hands with the ranchman, his wife and all the children in the family.

"Fred, they felt bad over the mistake the old man made, didn't they?"

"Yes, indeed! And I really felt sorry for their embarrassment when they found it out."

"So did I. But nobody could blame them for taking such precautions."

During the rest of the day they traveled through patches of timber and pieces of open prairie land.

The rations that the ranchman's wife fixed up for them gave them plenty for supper and for breakfast.

They slept on their blankets, but to keep the coyotes and wolves away they built a big fire by a log.

All night long they heard wolves and coyotes barking all around them in the timber, but the fire kept them a safe distance away from the horses.

Of course, they were off very early the next morning.

The stars had not all faded out of sight as they started off.

Before they got through the timber Fred brought down a fine buck with his Winchester, and they dismounted and secured its hams.

Up to that time they hadn't been forced to cook a meal.

They had their inevitable supply of coffee and a coffee-pot with them, so that day at noon they made coffee and broiled venison steak.

Along in the middle of the afternoon they struck another little village of about twenty-five or thirty cabins, and they wondered how in the world the people were making a support away out so far from any market.

A lot of the men and women came out to see them, for it was a rare thing for a stranger to pass that way.

Of course, the inevitable bar-room was there and a couple of stores.

They asked them how they all made a living, and one man said:

"Well, about half of us hunt for food; some work on a nearby ranch, some buy and trade horses, and there isn't a loafer in the town, Pard."

"Well, is there a hotel or tavern in the place?"

"Well, just a sort of one, Mister. It's just a pile of logs with a roof over them and cut up into little rooms, where people who are away from home can find quarters."

"All right, then; we'll stop there."

CHAPTER IV.

A LANDLORD WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY.

The man in the little village went along with them to show them where the little tavern was.

It was just what they expected. It was over the only bar-room in the place.

Fred looked at Terry and shook his head, for there were fully a score of men crowded up before the rough bar drinking the toughest whisky to be had in all the West.

Some were drunk and scarcely able to stand. Others were half drunk, and still others were in a condition that told they would be dead drunk in a little while.

They both turned and went out of the place, followed by their guide.

"Look here, Mister," said Fred, "there's no sleep for anybody in this place to-night. Those fellows are getting drunk, and soon they'll become so boisterous that no one could sleep in any part of the house. Is there no other place in the village where we can find quarters?"

The fellow looked at him and then slowly shook his head and said:

"Mister, there ain't no big houses in this place. Every man built his house according to the size of his family, and they ain't got no extra rooms."

"Well, maybe some family in the place, for good pay, will manage to let us have a room by crowding the family into close quarters. We are men who don't drink liquors at all. We have been riding all day and will have to ride all day to-morrow."

"But how about our horses?" put in Terry.

"Oh, I can take care of the horses for you!"

"All right, then. You find a family that will make room for us, even if they haven't a bed to spare. We can lie on our blankets, and we will give the owner ten dollars in gold."

"Pard," said the man, "I reckon Bill Jones can make room for you."

"All right. You go and see Bill Jones and tell him that we will give him ten dollars in gold if he will make room for us, even if we have to sleep on our blankets on the floor, but we don't wish to sleep over the bar-room in the hotel."

"Just come along with me then, Mister," and the fellow started off.

They followed him, and after going about a quarter of a mile, the man stopped and knocked on the door of a three-roomed cabin.

The family had not retired.

Bill Jones, a big, rough sort of a fellow, came out and greeted the guide and wanted to know what the trouble was.

The guide told him.

"Jim," said Jones, "you know how crowded we are here."

"Yes, I told them that; but all they want is to get under shelter. They've got their blankets, and they won't mind sleeping on the kitchen floor."

Jones called his wife out and told her the story and offered to leave it with her.

"Bill," said she, "we can let 'em have the kitchen; there ain't nothing in there that anybody would want to steal."

Fred laughed and remarked:

"Mrs. Jones, there is nothing in the world that we want to steal. We are not so poor that it is necessary for us to take anything that doesn't belong to us. We don't drink liquor, and don't like to have men around us who do. That is why we won't sleep at the tavern. There are at least a dozen men there drunk now, and by and by they will be firing off their pistols, and then a man couldn't sleep a wink."

Jones asked them where they were from, and they said Ranchman's Rest, at the lower end of the state, where they owned a ranch, and they were going farther west to visit a friend of theirs who owned a sheep ranch.

"Say, Mister, I've been all over the lower part of Arizona, and I don't know of but one sheep ranch out there."

"Well, do you know Tom Mason?"

"Yes, sir; that is the one I do know."

"Well, he is a particular friend of ours, and that is where we are going."

"That settles it, Mister. You can come in and sleep in our kitchen. My wife keeps a clean kitchen, let me tell you, but it ain't filled with good things to eat. We haven't got any bedclothes for you."

"All right. We have got a pair of splendid Mexican blankets, which I expect beat any bed in this part of the state."

Mrs. Jones lighted a homemade tallow candle and showed them into the kitchen.

She moved a rough table and three or four chairs out of the way and there was ample room for them to make a good bed of their blankets.

They took their saddles off their horses and brought them in.

The man who had charge of them was named Jim Green, so Jones told them, and he would take good care of their horses, as he had an acre or two back of his cabin that grew splendid grass.

By the light of the candle Fred fished out a ten-dollar goldpiece and handed it to Mrs. Jones, saying:

"There, madam, we will pay for our lodging in advance, and in the morning we are willing to pay for breakfast also."

Ten minutes later they pulled off their boots and coats and then laid down on the blankets and covered up their feet.

Jones took the candle out and they were left in intense darkness.

They slept well through the night.

Not one of the little children made any noise, which they really expected would awaken them through the night.

The next morning Jones came into the kitchen and greeted them with:

"Good-morning, Pards."

"Good-morning, friend Jones," they returned. "We slept quite well. What time does your family get up of mornings?"

"Pards, they are all up now, and if you two will get up mother will come in and get breakfast for you."

"We will be ready in just a couple of minutes," said Terry, pulling on his boots, Fred doing likewise.

They rolled up their blankets and tied them up hard and fast.

Then they proceeded to help him build up the fire.

"Pards," said Jones, while they were building the fire, "we ain't got much to eat in the house. We will just have jerked beef and plain bread."

"All right. Is there anything that can be bought in the store to help out?"

"Yes; they have got sugar, bacon and flour and other things there, but they are mighty expensive, let me tell you."

"All right. Here is five dollars. You go and get five dollars' worth of just what Mrs. Jones thinks she will need."

Jones looked at the money and then at Fred, and then said:

"Great rattlers, Pard! But you don't care much for money, do you?"

"Well, not when I see a worthy family like this in need of things. You have treated us white, and we want to show you that we appreciate it. Now, I've got in my little grip some of the best coffee you ever tasted in your life, and I'll have a pot of it made by the time you get back. If you are tired of jerked beef, get a side of bacon and bring it along with you."

Of course Mrs. Jones, in the other room, heard what he said, and she came in in great good humor.

Fred asked her where the spring was, and she told him it was down the path about a hundred yards.

"But I will send Tommie after the water," said she.

"You let Tommie sleep, Madam, and my friend and I will go after the water." So Fred took the coffee-pot and Terry the pail, and they followed the path down to the spring and washed themselves. About ten minutes later they came back with each vessel full of clear spring water.

Fred put the coffee-pot on the fire and then opened his grip and got out a tincup full of ground coffee.

Before the water boiled Jones returned with quite a lot of things that the five dollars had bought, among them a side of bacon, something the family was quite fond of. However, they were not able to indulge their taste in that direction very often, but that morning the good wife cut off nearly a dozen slices of it and put it in the frying-pan.

"Now, Madam, let me fry that bacon for you," said Terry.

"Do you know how to cook?" she asked.

"Yes, Madam. I've camped out several years of my life. I can cook anything."

She turned the pan over to him and sat down to watch him.

By and by she turned to Fred and told him that the water in his coffee-pot was "bilin'."

"So it is," said he, and he lifted it off of the coals.

He poured the tincup full of ground coffee into it and set it aside where it wouldn't boil.

When she tasted the coffee she looked at Fred and asked him where such coffee could be found.

"It can be found anywhere in this country in the large towns. We always take some of it with us whenever we go out hunting or mining. We have to be very economical with it, though, for no more of it can be had. The coffee you buy at these little mining settlements is of the very cheapest kind."

"Pard," said Jones, "what does such coffee as this cost where you got it?"

"About thirty-five cents a pound," he said.

"Great rattlers! And the mean stuff you get out here costs about seventy-five cents a pound!"

While they were eating, Green came around to inquire when they wanted their horses.

"Bring them around right away," said Fred.

"Say, Jim," called Jones, "take a cup of coffee and you'll say you never tasted anything like it in your life," and he poured a tincup full of coffee for Green, who drank it slowly and tasted every drop of it as it went down.

He expressed his liking for it in such extravagant language that Fred and Terry indulged in a hearty laugh.

He then went for the horses and soon returned leading them by the lariats with which they had been staked out in his garden.

"Mister," said he, turning to Fred and Terry, "have you got any tobacco?"

"Not a particle," they both replied. "We never use it. We don't chew nor smoke, nor do we drink liquors of any kind."

"But see here," added Fred, "here is something that will buy you a good supply of tobacco," and he gave him five dollars.

Green's eyes bulged, and he remarked:

"Mister, I ain't got a bit of change."

"All right. I don't want any change. You are what I call a white man, and so is your friend Jones. And if we come back this way we shall be sure to put up here again."

Then he and Terry searched in their pockets and found some silver change and placed a twenty-five cent piece in the hand of each one of the children.

Then they shook hands with all of them, and, mounting their horses, rode away.

Green went to the outskirts of the village to give them a start on the trail that would take them quickest to Mason's sheep ranch.

They passed the tavern which they struck the evening before and found a lot of men there drinking and carousing, some of whom had been up all night, and some had come in early for their morning drink. They stared at Fred and Terry as strangers, but said nothing at all.

"Terry," said Fred, "that is a hard place, and no mistake."

"You bet it is! It's a hard crowd that live around this way, too."

"Yes, but we were lucky in striking Jones. He seems to be a square sort of man, but evidently a poor provider for his family. It seems to me that he could find plenty of big game out in this part of the country and ought to keep his family well supplied with deer or bear meat."

They traveled at least twenty miles that day before they saw any house other than a ranch building.

They were riding across a range when they were stopped by five cowboys, who wanted to know who they were and why they were on that ranch.

Fred explained to them that they were traveling westward to lower Arizona.

The cowboys, though, seemed to be doubtful of their story.

They suspected them of being cattle thieves, because of their being strangers whom they had never seen before; so one of them ordered them to go back the way they had come.

"Look here," said Fearnot, "we are ranch owners ourselves, and we know that it is not the custom of ranchmen to refuse a passage across their ranches to respectable men."

"That's it, Mister," said the fellow. "We don't know whether you are respectable men or not."

"How far to the other end of this ranch?" Fred inquired.

"Mister, it is fully two miles."

"Then I will give each of you two dollars, which is a dollar a mile, to ride along with us to the other side and see that we don't steal any of your cattle."

"Show your money," said the man, and they gave them two dollars each, rather than be delayed or have any trouble with them.

The cowboys sprang on their horses and guided them across the range.

The cowboys seemed to be honest fellows, and apparently thought they were doing their duty by their employer.

Fred told them they had done just right, and when they parted on the farther side of the range he and Terry shook hands with them.

"How far is it now to the next village?" Terry inquired.

"Well, the only place where you can find any quarters would be at the ferry, which is twenty-five miles from here, at least."

"Oh, I didn't know there was a ferry. What kind is it?"

"Nothing but a flatboat, Pard, and a rope stretched over the river to pull it over by. They charge you fifty cents each for man and horse to take you across."

"Is there a village there?"

"Yes, about the size of the one you passed last night."

"What sort of people live there?"

"A pretty tough lot, Boss. I guess about half of them are horse thieves and cattle thieves. If they find out that you have any money they'll get it from you sure, unless you sleep with one eye open."

They rode pretty hard that afternoon to reach the ferry before dark.

On reaching the ferry they estimated that there were twenty-five or thirty houses in the place.

They found a little better tavern there, for there was a good deal of travel over that ferry, as there were several larger towns on the south side of the river.

They dismounted in front of the tavern and a man came out to take charge of the horses.

"Have you got anything for a horse to eat?"

"Yes, Boss," said the man.

"Well, will we be sure to find our horses when we wake up to-morrow morning?"

"Boss, you'll have to see the landlord about that. Horses are stolen out here every night in the week. I don't know whether the boss will be responsible for your horses or not."

They went into the place and found that the principal business was selling mean whisky.

Fred interviewed the landlord and wanted to know if they could get supper and a bed.

"Why, that is what I am here for, Mister."

"All right. Supper for two, please, and put us in a room together. Your man took our horses around to the stable. They are good horses, and we don't want to lose them. Can you guarantee they won't be stolen before morning?"

"No, sir. I won't guarantee anything out here in this country. I've had four horses stolen from me, so I've quit keeping them. But I keep plenty of provender for other people's horses."

"Well, is there no way of a man protecting his property out here?"

"Not unless he does it himself."

They waited for supper, and found it made of jerked beef and some beans and bacon and a decoction that the waiter called coffee, but neither of them would drink it.

Terry asked the waiter if it was made of bootlegs and old shoes.

The fellow never smiled, but said it was made of the best coffee that could be had in that section of the country.

"Take it away," said Fred, and so they drank no coffee that night, but called for water.

Then Fred went to see the landlord about their horses.

He said that he had a big stable with stalls for as many as a dozen horses, but that many horses had been stolen from him; that locks were no protection.

"Well, landlord, what is the matter with you letting us sleep in the stall with our horses?"

"All right. But there are no beds there."

"We don't want any beds. We will roll in our blankets and lie in the trough. Have you got a lantern?"

"Yes, several of them," and he called up one of his hired men and told him to show the gentlemen to where their horses were in the stable.

CHAPTER V.

HOW FRED AND TERRY ASTOUNDED THE NATIVES.

The hired man lighted a lantern, and, turning to Fred, nodded his head and he and Terry followed him around to

the stable, which was a very roughly-constructed building. The horses were placed in adjoining stalls.

They found the horses feeding on a big pile of hay, but no corn or oats.

"Look here, my good fellow," said Fred. "You see these are good horses."

"Yes, Boss, they are the best-looking horses we have had come this way in many a day."

"Well, the landlord refuses to be responsible for them showing up to-morrow morning; so we are going to make our beds in the troughs. One in each stall. Here is a dollar for you, so you just keep your mouth shut. We can't afford to lose our horses, for they are valuable animals."

"All right, Boss. Mum's the word," and the fellow held up his lantern to let them see how to fix their blankets in the troughs, which were ample enough for the purpose.

When they were well settled down into their improvised beds the man left the stable with his lantern and they were in black darkness.

They were very tired from the long day's ride, and pretty soon they were dozing.

Along about midnight they were awakened by the slight glimmer of a small light and found two men, rough-looking chaps, trying to untie the lariat that held Fred's horse in the stall.

Fred sprang up from his bed and seized one fellow by the throat and choked him so he couldn't make any noise.

Terry served his man the same way, with the exception he didn't get him by the throat, but knocked him down by a blow direct from the shoulder.

"Got your man, Terry?" Fred inquired.

"Yes. What have you done with yours?"

"He is lying on the ground here. I choked all his wind off."

"Well, what shall we do with them?"

"Tie their hands behind them," Fred suggested, "and throw them under the troughs. Look around and see if you can find any loose rope."

In every stall Terry found pieces of rope hanging to use for horses that might come in during the day.

With them they tied the villains' hands behind their backs, by which time they had recovered sufficiently to begin begging.

"Shut up," said Fred. "You came in here for our horses, and we have been waiting here to catch you."

With that he tripped him and threw him under the trough, telling him to go to sleep and keep quiet, but if he disturbed him he would get up and split his windpipe for him.

"Boss," pleaded the fellow, "just let us go and we will never let you see us again."

"I don't do business that way," said Fred.

Terry then put out the little light that they had brought in with them.

It was in a tin lantern with holes punched all around it. Then they retired to their troughs again.

Pretty soon they heard signals outside of the stable and those under the troughs were heard signaling back to them.

Fred and Terry got up and waited to see if anyone came in from the outside.

They knew they were pals of the thieves that they had caught.

The signaling went on for quite awhile, and by and by somebody entered the stable and began feeling his way around among the stalls.

It was so dark that the man couldn't see his hand an inch before his nose.

Finally one of them lighted a small lantern, and, holding it above his head, right in front of Terry's stall, enabled the latter to land a blow on his jaw.

The fellow dropped the lantern, of course, and fled from the stable.

Terry snatched up the lantern to avoid a conflagration.

He quickly put it out, and then he and Fred listened to the fellow outside groaning in great agony.

It seems that somebody heard him, took charge of him and led him into the tavern.

There he was seen by all the guests, but of course he wouldn't tell anything.

He said that somebody had hit him outside on his jaw.

He suffered so much pain that Fred and Terry actually heard him yelling out in the stable.

They were some of his pals at the tavern, no doubt, and they wondered how the thing could have happened.

Finally the landlord said that two late arrivals had gone out there to guard their horses all night, and that it was very dangerous for strangers to go in there.

Still two more undertook to go in, each with his revolver in his hand, determined to revenge their pals.

Fred and Terry arose, with revolvers ready to receive them, but as each one carried a lantern, Terry called out:

"Stop there! Get out, or you'll drop dead where you are!"

They turned and hurried out, and that was the last time they were disturbed during the night.

In the morning when the stableman came to feed the horses, they found Fred and Terry rolling up their blankets and each with a man tied up under the trough.

"Now, will you look after these horses?" Fred inquired.

"Yes, Boss. They won't try it in the daytime."

"All right." And each reached down under the trough, seized his prisoner and dragged him out and led him around to the tavern.

It was very early, but there was quite a crowd in the bar-room drinking to get appetites for their breakfast.

They led them right into the bar-room, where Fred called to the landlord to know if he knew who they were.

"Yes," said he. "They come here quite often."

"Well, they are horse thieves. We caught them about midnight and tied them up, for they entered the stall and tried to lead the horses out. What do you do with horse thieves out here?"

"Well, the general thing is to swing them up, Mister."

"Well, call out the men who do the swinging. That is what we won't take a hand in."

A big, burly fellow drew his revolver and said:

"There won't be any lynching here while I am about."

"Why, is this fellow a pal of yours, and are you a horse thief, too?"

Quick as a flash the fellow fired at Fred's head, and it took his hat off.

Fred knocked up his pistol and then knocked him down, disarmed him and then began wiping up the floor with him.

The fellow was a big, tough chap, and evidently a typical Western bluff.

Fred knocked him right and left. He lifted him up on his feet, pummeled him and then let him drop.

Others in the bar-room looked on utterly dumfounded at the way Fred handled him.

"Anybody got a rawhide here?" Fred asked.

Somebody produced one, and he proceeded to draw the fellow's shirt and lay it on his bare back with savage energy.

The fellow begged like a whipped Spaniel.

"You shot at the wrong man, you horse thief," said Fred. "It was easy enough for me to kill you with a bullet, but I never waste lead on such chaps as you are."

Usually, under such circumstances, the crowd sides with the fellow that shows the grit that Fred did, and they rushed on Fred and said:

"Stop, Pard. Let us finish him," and they actually dragged him out of the house.

Others seized the prisoners they had brought in and dragged them out, too.

They knew what to expect and they began begging for their lives in a whining sort of way.

Fred was puzzled to know what to do.

He never favored lynching in his life, but he couldn't do a thing with that crowd.

They hurried the fellows across the river in the old ferry flat and swung them up to the limbs of some big trees on the farther bank.

The man with the injured jaw had wandered away somewhere and they never saw him again.

When they came back from across the river one of them motioned to Terry like tying a rope around a man's neck, and, pointing overhead, which Terry interpreted to mean the three horse thieves had been hanged.

"By George, Fred, they swung them up!" said Terry.

"Well, I'm sorry. I didn't intend that should happen."

"Well, it serves them right. Our hands are clean. We simply captured them, whilst they did the business for them."

Once more back at the tavern, the rough men crowded around Fred to shake his hand and say all sorts of complimentary things to him.

They had a way of saying:

"Pard, shake! You are a white man!" And every one of them wanted him to drink with them, and when he told them he never drank, chewed or smoked, some of them looked thoroughly disgusted, and they actually reasoned with him about such foolishness, as they called it.

"What do you drink? How can you live without taking something hot to drink?"

"Well, a cup of hot coffee is about as hot as anything I ever drink. We could not have captured those two fellows had we been in the habit of drinking intoxicants. Other people may drink as much as they please; it is their business, and not mine. I take care of my own health, and the result is I've acquired by practice the strength that I now have."

One big fellow asked:

"How strong are you, Pard?"

"Well, let me show you," and he reached out his hand and said:

"Shake, and squeeze my hand as hard as you please."

The fellow's hand joined his and he began squeezing.

The next moment he rose on his toes and exclaimed frantically:

"Stop!"

"There you are!" said Fred. "That's the grip of a man who never took a drink in his life."

"Pard, let me shake with you," said a tough-looking old fellow.

"All right," and in less than half a minute the fellow rose on his toes and also gasped:

"Le'go!"

"That's just one of my dry grips," said Fred.

Of course, he was a revelation to those whisky guzzlers.

They stood around, glared at him and talked with each other.

One man asked Terry if he knew anything about wrestling.

"Yes, I used to wrestle," said he.

"Well, I've thrown every man who ever stopped at this tavern,"

"You have, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's see if you can throw me. But we'd better come out here where the fall won't hurt you. I notice there is a good deal of sand in front of the tavern."

There they clinched, and three times in succession Terry hurled the fellow clear over his shoulder.

After the third time the man got up, limped to the steps of the tavern and sat down, saying:

"Pard, that man's Old Nick, but where he keeps his horns blessed if I know!"

Terry laughed and remarked:

"I guess you won't find any horns on me. The trouble with you is that you've been taking too many horns."

The others saw the point and laughed heartily.

"Why, Pard, did you never take a drink, either?"

"Yes," said Terry. "Some two years ago, before I was of age, I did take enough to make me jolly drunk, but I've never tasted any of the stuff since. It's the most foolish thing that a man can do."

"Don't you smoke either?"

"Never smoked but one cigar in my life, and it made me as sick a boy as you ever want to see. If nature had intended that a man should smoke he would have been built with a sort of chimney to him. You perhaps don't know it, but man is the only member of the animal kingdom that pans out fools."

"Well, that is the first time I've ever heard a man called an animal," said one of them.

"Well, he is. He is just as much of an animal as a horse, a cow, or a dog is. He is flesh and blood, and the same things that will kill one will kill the other. Animals follow instinct, and I have more respect for animal instinct than for human judgment. You never saw a cow or a horse in his natural state eat more or drink more than is good for him. It is only when man interferes with them that harm comes of what they eat and drink. A wild horse never gets foundered, for he eats just enough of what is good for him and then stops. But man makes a fool of himself. He drinks and eats things that are not good for him. It is a man's eating that gives him dyspepsia; it's drinking too much intoxicants that makes him a desperate and dangerous fool. He has the jimjams, sees monkeys and snakes chasing him around. He goes out and picks fights with sober men and gets well thrashed. If you can tell me anything more foolish than that, I'd like to hear it. Now, landlord, I'm not preaching a temperance sermon for the purpose of putting a stop to your liquor selling, but you, yourself, have seen men come in here and drink till they have the jimjams and try to kill somebody, haven't you?"

"Many a time. I think a man ought to stop when he has got enough."

"Yes; but when a man has got enough he hasn't sense enough left to know it. If you try to stop him then he will draw his gun and begin shooting. Everybody thinks it is nobody's business how much he drinks. This is a free country, and if he wants to kill himself it is nobody's business but his own, so he says."

"Well, I never heard a white man talk that way before," said one of the roughs in the bar-room.

"Go East! Go East!" laughed Terry, "and you'll find lots of men who talk that way, and act that way, too."

CHAPTER VI.

FRED AND TERRY REACH THE SHEEP RANCH IN ARIZONA.

There were horse stealers at the tavern who had never been suspected by the proprietor or any of the others but their pals. They had the good sense to keep quiet and say nothing in protest to the execution of the unwritten law of the Far West, but they felt keenly the fate that had met their pals.

They stared at Fred and Terry, wondering what sort of men they were.

Some of them quietly made the inquiry as to their destination on their splendid horses, and learned that they were going out to Arizona to visit the newly-discovered gold fields.

The news of that discovery had reached that part of the country, and people arrived daily and crossed the river on the ferry for the same destination.

Several of the horse thieves decided to go on ahead of

Fred and Terry and waylay them on the highway and shoot them from their saddles from ambush.

They had a double motive for so doing. One was for revenge and the other was to get possession of the horses and saddles and whatever funds they had about their persons.

So they conspired together, five of them, and soon after breakfast they paid the bills they owed the tavern, mounted their horses and rode away about three hours ahead of Fred and Terry.

As the latter were mounting their horses to start on their journey the stableman, to whom they had been very generous, whispered to Fred:

"Boss, five men have just left the tavern and gone on ahead of you for the purpose of ambushing you and your partner. They belong to a gang of horse stealers, so you want to look out for them."

"Are you sure of that?" Fred asked.

"Yes, Boss. The leader is on that piebald horse. I'm telling you this because you and your partner have been very kind to me."

"Well, we like to repay kindness, and I'm glad you have appreciated it," and with that he took a five-dollar bill and put it in the fellow's hands as he bade him goodbye.

Soon after they crossed the river in the flatboat Fred related to Terry what the stableman had said to him.

Terry looked serious for a few moments, and then said:

"Fred, I believe I know everyone of that gang. I was suspicious of them because they hadn't a word to say when the trouble was going on in the tavern after we took the prisoners in. They knew the danger of interfering. I think I would know everyone of them should we meet them again. The fellow who owns that piebald horse is the man with a big red beard and mustache."

"Yes, I remember him, but I hadn't connected him with the piebald horse. But we will keep a sharp lookout for them. I never saw any of them with any weapon except revolvers. It may be that some of them have Winchesters, but I never noticed it."

They rode briskly forward, and about noon struck a little hamlet where there was the inevitable saloon, and in front of it, among a dozen horses, they saw the piebald horse hitched to one of the posts.

Terry called Fred's attention to it.

"Here they are, Fred," he said. "They have just dismounted and gone in there for drinks. What's the matter with our going in and giving them a chance to knock us out?"

"What's the use of that, Terry? We will either be hurt ourselves or have to kill two or three of their number; so let's push on and get ahead of them. No matter how bad they are, we don't want to start a fight with them."

"Well, they are out for our scalps."

"Very true; but we don't want theirs, unless they force us to take them," and with that they rode by without stopping.

Soon they were out of sight of the place.

"Well, we got out of that much easier than I thought we would," said Fred.

"Well, I can't say that I'm disposed to feel glad about it," remarked Terry, "for if I know a man is laying for me for the purpose of wiping me out, I have a very strong desire to return the compliment."

"That's all right, Terry, as far as it goes. You and I claim to be civilized individuals."

"Get out," said Terry. "I claim to be a wild savage, who follows the Scriptural injunction of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You are a savage also," he added, "only it takes more to get the savage aroused in you than it does in me."

"Well, I want to wait till I have some excuse to shoot a man."

"Yes; you want to wait till you are shot first. I'm not built up that way. I quite agree with David Harum, who advised a friend to 'do others as they would do him, and do it first.'"

"Well, old David was all right," laughed Fred, "but he was speaking commercially. He wasn't really a fighter."

"No; that was because he lived out East instead of away out West."

They rode pretty steadily all day long, and one day's traveling was but a repetition of the other.

Five days after crossing the river they came in sight of Tom's sheep ranch.

They recognized the houses.

Several new houses had been erected on the place, and the big house, which was Tom's residence, had been repaired, and actually painted.

"Great Scott, Terry! That looks as though Tom had been trying to make up his mind to take a wife. Just think of it! I don't believe that another ranch-house anywhere in this section ever felt the touch of a paint brush."

They rode up to the house and gave a loud halloo.

A man came out and Terry inquired if Tom was in.

"Boss," said the fellow, "there are several Toms on this ranch. Which one do you mean?"

"I mean the owner of it, Mr. Mason."

"He is down on the range somewhere, sir."

Fred and Terry promptly dismounted and hitched their horses to posts in front of the gate and went up on the piazza of the residence, where Fred said to him:

"Are you in Mason's employ?"

"Yes, sir; I am."

"Well, either go or send word to him to come up to the house, as two friends of his have just arrived from the East."

The man looked at both of them rather scrutinizingly, and asked:

"Are you Mr. Fearnot?"

"Yes, Fearnot and Olcott."

"Well, he has been worrying some time about your coming. Just sit down and wait till I call him up from the range," and with that the man went to one of the cabins in the rear of the house, and the next moment they heard the tooting of an immense horn, which could easily be heard miles away.

Three long blasts were sent rolling over the prairie.

A little later they saw Tom riding furiously toward the house and dashed up to the door, where he sprang from his saddle and caught each one of them in his arms with a degree of heartiness that actually made them laugh.

"Great rattlers, boys! I never was so glad to see you in my life."

"Glad to see you, old man," they both remarked. "I never saw you looking so well, Tom."

"I never felt better in my life," he replied. "The fact is, I don't get exercise enough to prevent the accumulation of fat. I weigh at least twenty pounds more than I did when you saw me last."

"What is the matter with you? Why don't you take exercise?"

"Because the business doesn't require it."

"Well, why don't you fix up a gymnasium and exercise your muscles? Some day you'll run up against a man who is stronger than you are and you'll get a sound thrashing."

"No danger of that, Pard. I've got the reputation out here of being a very, very bad man."

"Oh, you have, eh! How is your ranch doing? Have you got as many sheep as when we left you?"

"Nearly twice the number. The sheep stealers have come to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to risk their lives stealing sheep, for they are very cheap you know out here, whilst a good, fat steer is very valuable."

"Look here, Tom, what does all this white house mean?"

"Why, it means that I am living respectable, like a white man ought to live. Some firm sent me a circular, telling all about paints, and I ordered enough to paint the house, giving it two good, heavy coats, and now the ranch is called 'The White House' ranch. Like the cowboys on your ranch, all of mine have Winchesters, and they are good marksmen, too. When they shoot, they shoot to kill. Now, come in and make yourselves at home," and he led the way into the house, which they found comfortably furnished.

There were at least half a dozen bedrooms that were furnished as neatly and comfortably as could be found in any private residence in that part of the country.

To their astonishment they found the parlor carpeted and a suite of parlor furniture, too.

As Fred looked around, he turned, looked Tom in the eyes and asked:

"Say, Tom, are you married?"

"No."

"Engaged?"

"No."

"Well, are you thinking about getting a wife?"

"Well, I'm on the lookout for a good one."

"Just as I suspected. That accounts for the paint and all this nice household furnishing. It's the best thing for you. Find a good girl, one not given to much frivolity, and it will be the best thing in the world for you. You wouldn't become restless and want to go out on a gold hunting expedition."

He laughed and said:

"That is all good advice, old man. I know a girl that

I think would suit me, but I don't know whether she has the same opinion of me or not."

"The best way to find out is to ask her."

"Yes. I know that, but I'd rather stand up and shoot with a lot of fellows all day than to ask her such a question."

"What do you think of that, Terry?" laughed Fred.

"Well, I think it is a sure sign he is in love with her."

"Well, I don't know whether I am or not," said Tom, "but I really think she is a very nice girl. She is about twenty-five years of age, and weighs a hundred and seventy-five pounds."

"A pretty healthy girl," laughed Terry.

"Well, I'm no lightweight myself. I dare say I'd pull down the scales at a hundred and ninety pounds."

"Well, is she a nearby neighbor?"

"About twenty miles away," he replied.

"Does she live on a ranch?"

"Yes. Her father is a ranchman, but like the majority of cattlemen, he has more or less contempt for the sheep man. I invited the whole family to come out here and spend the day with me, and they all came, a big wagonload of them. The old man, the wife and seven children, three grown daughters and the rest little boys and girls. They stayed two days, and I gave each one of the girls a little lamb out of the flock, and they took them home with them in their arms."

"You are all right, old man," laughed Terry. "Let us know when you are going to hiteh up, and I'll advise you to attend to that matter while we are out here. But now tell us about the new gold diggings."

"Well, it is only a good day's ride from here, and the miners are flocking in by hundreds, and already I believe I've sold at least a couple of hundred sheep to them. They slaughter them here on the ranch and send them over by wagonloads. They say that it's the only diggings where they have ever been able to get mutton or lamb, and they pay pretty good prices for it, too. They don't want any jerked beef in theirs, they say."

"Well, has any very good paydirt been found?"

"Yes; some of them have met with good luck; but, of course, the majority of them have failed to strike paydirt at all, and a lot of them are dead broke. I've staked half a dozen of them with sheep meat, and they are to divide their findings with me."

"Well, have any of them you staked reported any good luck?"

"Not one," and he shook his head, "but I can stand the loss, for I've got at least seven or eight thousand sheep on the place. One miner, a German, struck it pretty rich. He got about seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of gold dug out of his mine and then sold out the claim to three men for a hundred thousand dollars cash."

"Good! Good! That is doing fine. How is it that you haven't bought a claim yourself?"

"Pard, all the money that I have left, after buying and living up this ranch, is in bank down at Tucson, and it's going to stay there. I'd rather go out and dig about and

find paydirt than to pay out good money for it, for when you buy a claim you are never sure that you are getting anything worth digging out of it. What is down in the earth is out of sight."

"By George, old man, you are about the most level-headed fellow I ever met in any diggings," said Fred. "Now, when can we go out there and look around for ourselves?"

"Any day you want to start, but we had better wait a few days until your horses are well rested. You have been traveling for a week or two, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Fred, "nearly two weeks. We started from our ranch within twenty miles of Ranchman's Rest, in the western part of Colorado."

"Great rattlers! Why didn't you come around by rail?"

"Because we had to go to the ranch first to look after a little business and get the horses that we wanted. They are good stock, which can't very well be found in this part of the country. Nine out of ten horses out here belong to the cayuse family."

"Yes, that's so. They are pretty good workers, but you can never be sure when they won't play tricks."

They rested there at the ranch for four days, and, of course, went all over the big range, inspected the flock of sheep, talked with the cowboys, and noted the improvements that had been made.

They were highly pleased with everything they saw.

The cowboys were receiving good pay, had comfortable cabins, were well fed, and all seemed to be really good fellows.

Tom treated them kindly. Having been a cowboy himself for a number of years, he was fair with everyone. He treated them all as his equal, and every man on the place was his firm friend.

There was one man on his place whom he called his lieutenant. His name was Jones, plain Jack Jones.

Jack had a very ugly scar on his left cheek, which he had gotten in a fight some years before from an expert handler of the bowie-knife.

He was a very clever, amiable sort of a fellow, but when he looked straight at one that scar gave him the look of a desperado.

"He isn't at all handsome," remarked Mason, "but in a scrimmage he can do some of the most handsomest work you want to see, and he is pretty near what you would call a deadshot. He can draw and shoot about the quickest of any man I know except you two. Whenever I'm absent he takes charge of the ranch, and the others all obey him as promptly and faithfully as they obey me. I'm afraid, though, that some of my help are itching to take a try at the gold diggings, but I tell them it is a dangerous place for them; that they had better be satisfied with the work they are doing now, and stay where they are. I will promise every one that if he wants to marry, I'll build him a comfortable house, where he can live, rent free, and charge him nothing for supplies, no matter how many he may have in his family."

"That's right! That's right!" said Fred. "Have any of them married yet?"

"No; but some of them are courting girls in the neighborhood, and if they all marry, I'll have quite a little town on the place."

After the end of four days Tom called in his lieutenant, Jones, and told him that the next morning they were going out to take a look at the mines, and he expected him to look after the place during his absence and slaughter and sell sheep as they were demanded.

He said:

"All right, Boss. When you come back, no matter when, you'll find things just as you left them."

So the next day they mounted their horses before sunrise and rode west for fifty miles.

CHAPTER VII.

FRED AND THE SWINDLING MINE SALTER.

They reached the mining camp a little after dark.

They had traveled fifty miles, and the long ride was pretty hard on the horses.

Tom rode straight to the headquarters of the man who was buying meat from him.

He had been out there on one trip with his meat, fearing that some sort of a swindling game might be played on him, but the dealer had dealt square with him, knowing that no more could be had from the ranch if he did otherwise.

The fellow lived in a rude log cabin, which he and two of his men had built for the purpose.

So when they rode up Mason greeted one of the butchers, such he may be called, and asked him where he could make their horses so they would be safe.

"Well," said the butcher, "I reckon you'd better put 'em in the pen where your men keep theirs whenever they come in with a load of meat."

"Will they be safe there?"

"Well, you ain't lost any horses there yet, and they have come in every other day. But you never know what'll happen in the diggings."

"Well, I have two friends with me from out East, and they value their horses very highly."

"I guess they won't be running much risk," said the butcher, and they took off the bridles and saddles and left the horses in the inclosure.

"Now, where can we sleep?"

"On the floor in my cabin."

"All right. We have blankets and they are about the best beds we have found in these diggings."

So they spread their blankets and laid down for a rest after such a long ride.

They were up very early the next morning, and Fred and Terry, urged by curiosity, went around to the place where they sold meat to see the miners come in after their breakfast supplies.

They were standing by quietly looking on when a man

came up and gave Fred a heavy slap on the shoulder, accompanied by an exclamation of:

"Hello, Fearnot! When did you get here?"

Fred wheeled and found himself face to face with an old friend, who, when he last saw him, was a Wall street broker.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Terry, here is Broker Middleton!"

"Hello, Olcott!" exclaimed Middleton, and the two shook hands very cordially.

The broker was dressed like an ordinary miner. He had permitted his beard to grow out all around, for shaving out there was very inconvenient.

"We just came in to-night," said Fred, "with a friend of ours, who owns the ranch where all this meat comes from."

"Well, I never was so glad to see a man in my life. I came out two weeks ago with two friends of mine, Phil Brown and Joe Elsworth."

"Great Scott! What brought you three out here?"

"Wild rumors of rich gold fields," he replied.

"Well, have you been digging?"

"Yes; but we have found nothing as yet."

"Quite disappointing, eh?"

"Yes, quite so. But we are not the only ones who have failed to find paydirt. If I've had one to offer to sell claims to me I've had a hundred. Somehow or other they have found out here that I am from Wall street; hence they think I am able to pay a million of dollars for anything I want."

"Yes, of course! The farther away you get from Wall street the bigger the name sounds to the ordinary man. But where have you got your headquarters?"

"Just around the hill there. We brought out a tent just large enough for three of us to sleep under, but it is very comfortable and waterproof. Where are you holding forth?"

"Well, we slept in the cabin of this butcher here last night. Of course, we had our blankets, and that is all the bed we control."

"It's the same with us. You have been in the diggings before?"

"Not in these diggings; never saw them until last night."

"That's all right. They wouldn't call you a tenderfoot, but that is the name we go by."

"Oh, yes, of course. You go by that name anywhere in the far West."

"Well, I hope we can get some benefit from your experience."

"All right. Anything that Terry or I can do for you we will do cheerfully."

Just then he called Tom up and introduced him to the broker, and Tom received him with great cordiality, saying that any man who was a friend of Fearnot and Olcott was his friend also.

The broker bought some mutton chops to broil before their tent on the coals, and invited Fred and Terry and Mason to go to his tent and help themselves to breakfast.

"We eat our meat without any bread, and drink our coffee without any sugar or milk."

"Great Scott! You don't expect pound cake and other delicacies in a camp like this, do you?" asked Fred.

"Oh, no! It went pretty hard with us at first, but we have gotten used to it now." They went around with the broker and found the other two men, Elsworth and Brown.

They fairly jumped with joy when they saw two well-known young athletes.

Said Brown:

"I never was so glad to see two men in my life. We six combined can lick the whole camp if they want to fight."

"What is the matter with you? You spoiling for a fight?" Terry asked.

"No; but we have been bluffed several times, and I'm sure there would have been a fight if you two fellows had been with us."

"That's so," put in Middleton. "Two fellows came along with claims to sell, saying it was dirt cheap at a quarter of a million, and actually threatened to lick me if I didn't make a bid on it. They had heard I was from Wall street and expected me to come out with a million dollars to buy up the whole gold field. There have been some trades made and some good gold found, but nine out of ten men we meet are in hard luck, claiming that it is their belief that all the gold runs in a narrow line, which has always been claimed."

Fred asked permission to make the coffee for them, and when they tasted it they became wildly enthusiastic over it.

By noon Fred and Terry had become known as Wall street men, and a rush of claim sellers was made on them.

"Gentlemen," said Fred, "we are out here to look around, and if we can find a claim that is panning out good paydirt we will buy. But don't make the mistake of taking us for tenderfeet, for we have mined, not only in Arizona, but in Nevada and in Colorado. We had rather find paydirt than buy it."

"Well," several of them said, "my claim is panning out finely."

"Then why don't you work it?" Fred asked one of them.

"Because I've got to leave the diggings and go home. One of my children has died and two others are very sick, and it won't do to leave the diggings until I do sell out."

"That's right. I understand all that sort of thing. But I'm going to take my time about it and be sure that I get paydirt when I buy."

"All right. Come around and see my claim. Go down into it and dig all day long and then make me an offer."

Fred wrote down on the back of an envelope the locality of the fellow's claim, and told him he would get around there as soon as possible.

Along in the afternoon Mason's wagon loaded with slaughtered sheep reached the camp, and that night Terry suggested to Fred that they send their horses back the next morning with the wagon, and that when they wanted to leave the diggings the horses could be brought back with the next wagon, or they could foot it back to the ranch.

Fred agreed to it, and Tom ordered the horses taken back the next day.

Thus they were relieved of the responsibility of their safe-keeping.

During the day Terry managed to buy a good-sized tent from two discouraged miners who wanted to leave the camp, and they stretched it alongside of their New York friends' tent, so they practically joined forces.

They moved their blankets and satchels into it.

Their bridles and saddles went back with the horses.

It didn't take the claim sellers very long to find out that Fred and Terry were anything else but tenderfeet; that they knew all about mining both gold and silver, and that they were not men who could be bluffed, either.

Fred and Terry and Middleton went around visiting a number of claims. Some were being busily worked; others were being hawked about like street hawkers in the large cities, and wonderful stories were told of the immense yield of paydirt.

Finally Middleton said to Fred:

"I haven't told you about it, but I bought a claim just a few days ago. A man asked originally fifty thousand dollars for it, and I went down into it, and with spade and shovel took out about fifty dollars in small particles of gold. I suppose if I had had more experience I might have done better."

"Well, that was a pretty good yield," said Fred. "If a tenderfoot could do as well, an experienced miner might be able to double it. Show me where it is."

He led Fred to the place, and when he saw the shaft deep down under a hill, Fred asked him why he hadn't put men to work in it.

"I've done my best. I've offered ten dollars a day for two good, strong miners, but not one could I get to tackle it."

"Middleton, how much did you pay for this claim?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"And they originally asked you fifty thousand for it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is a considerable come-down. The thought didn't occur to you. I suppose, that if it panned out any paydirt they wouldn't let it go at such a figure?"

"No; I didn't think of it."

Just then a big, bearded miner, followed by half a dozen others, came around to look on and listen.

The big miner said to Fred:

"I'm the man who sold this claim, and I got at least twenty thousand dollars' worth of paydirt out of it, but I struck another and a richer one. I couldn't work both, so I sold it cheap to your friend here."

"Yes; very cheap," said Fred, "but perhaps it was a very expensive purchase for him. He says that you asked him at first fifty thousand dollars for it, but finally let him have it for ten thousand, a difference of forty thousand dollars, a considerable drop-down."

"Yes; it is the way merchants and other people do when they are obliged to sell. If they can't get their price they take their customer's price."

"Yes, I know that is the rule; but if you got twenty thousand dollars' worth of dust out of it it would have been cheap at your original price."

The man looked him straight in the face and asked:

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"Yes, sir," said Fred, very promptly, and his hand went around on the handle of his revolver.

"Well, you have the right to do that," said the man, very coolly.

"Of course I have! This is a free country."

The man turned around and walked away.

Fred took a spade and went down into the shaft and shoveled out about a bushel of dirt, and there wasn't a cent's worth of gold in it.

Fred and Middleton then walked away from the shaft talking in low tones.

As they strolled back Fred noticed the big, bearded fellow following them.

He noticed two others climbing over a knoll just behind him, whilst still others were talking earnestly to two of Middleton's friends who had come out with him over by the cabin near the claim.

They were all watching and listening to hear what Fred was saying.

Seeing which, he raised his voice and said, emphatically: "I tell you, you've been most outrageously swindled. There isn't an ounce of gold in that claim that wasn't put there to deceive you, and you'll never see your money again."

"Great Scott, Fred! Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, just as sure as I am that I am living. You've heard about salted mines, haven't you?"

"Of course I've read about them, but I never saw one. I believe it is a certain amount of gold sprinkled about in the bottom of a shaft to make one believe that it is pay-dirt."

"That is just what it is," said one.

The big, bearded fellow was standing by listening with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, how am I to get out of it?" Middleton asked.

"Well, if I were in your place I'd make that fellow return the money or just fill him up with lead."

The big fellow looked at Middleton, and a sardonic smile appeared on his face.

Evidently he had his hand on his revolver in his pocket and stood ready to use it if he saw his victim ready to draw on him.

Middleton looked straight in his eyes as if undecided what to do. To be swindled to the tune of ten thousand dollars was a pretty hard blow.

The bearded fellow was quick to notice his hesitation.

Middleton asked him:

"Did you salt that mine?"

"I did not, sir."

Quick as a flash Fred spoke up and asked him if he didn't know that it was salted.

"No, I did not; and what's more, you don't know it,

either, for it has not been salted. If you say it is you are the biggest liar in this camp."

Fred jumped at him and knocked his right arm up to keep him from drawing, and tripped him, throwing him on the ground.

He tried to draw his revolver, but Fred practically paralyzed his arm by squeezing it with that mighty grip of his.

He took the weapon from him, and, handing it to Middleton, said:

"Shoot any man who interferes." Then he seized the man by the throat and choked him until his eyes fairly bulged out on his cheeks.

"Now, you return that ten thousand dollars," he said, "or you won't live to see the sun set this day."

The man was a powerful fellow, but with Fred's grip on his throat he was as a mere infant in his hand.

The two men who had been climbing over the little knoll just above Fred's and Middleton's heads started to hustle over and go to the miner's assistance, but Middleton, having confidence in Fred's ability to manage the fellow, wheeled around and leveled the revolver at them and they scrambled back.

They called several of their companions to their assistance, and told what was going on just over the knoll.

Evidently there was a gang of them working the game together.

Just then Middleton caught sight of Terry, who was talking with some miners over by the mining-house, and he called to him:

"Terry, come here quick!"

Terry and the other two brokers came running to the spot, followed by the two swindlers to whom he had been talking.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW FRED EXPOSED THE CLAIM SALTERS.

As Terry dashed up to the place he caught sight of Fred struggling with a big, bearded fellow on the ground.

"What's the trouble, Middleton?" he asked.

"Well, that fellow and some others sold me a salted mine for ten thousand dollars. Fred found it out and accused him and he called Fred a liar."

"Well, that is the worst thing he could have done."

The others who came up were evidently friends of the swindler, and they promptly protested.

Two of them drew their revolvers and threatened to shoot if Fearnot didn't release his grip on his man.

Quick as a flash Terry drew his weapon and said:

"Stand off, now! Let them fight it out. If there is any shooting to be done you may count me in, too."

The other two New Yorkers, who had followed him over, both drew their weapons and declared it should be a fair fight or they would shoot.

One of them noticed a hand holding a revolver aiming over the top of a little knoll behind Terry and Middleton, and said:

"Look behind you, Terry."

Terry looked behind and saw that somebody was aiming a revolver at Fred.

All he could see was the hand and the weapon.

Instantly Terry raised his revolver and fired at the hand, and the weapon rolled over the knoll and fell at Terry's feet.

His bullet, of course, had disabled the fellow's hand.

"Say, Elsworth," said Terry, "hunt up Tom Mason, or else go to our tents and bring the three Winchesters you will find there."

Elsworth started off on a run.

Some fifteen minutes later he came back, accompanied by the sheep rancher and the three Winchesters.

"Hello! Hello! What's the trouble?" Tom asked.

By this time Fred was sitting on the big, bearded miner, who had been struggling until his strength had practically given out.

"Say, Tom," said Fred, "this fellow and some pals of his sold Middleton a salted claim. He made the mistake of calling me a liar when I accused him of it, and that is what the trouble is about. Now, if he gets away alive he will have to pony up that ten thousand dollars."

Other miners kept running up, and many of them were very much excited.

One big fellow drew his revolver and threatened to shoot Fred if he didn't let up on his pard.

Tom Mason promptly leveled his Winchester at him, and said:

"If you mean that, Pard, I'm going to shoot first."

The man actually dropped his revolver on the ground and held up both his hands.

They had all understood that he was a ranchman, and they knew generally such men shoot, and shoot straight.

Fred then turned and looked at the big, bearded miner and said:

"We want that ten thousand dollars for that salted mine."

"I haven't got it," the fellow replied.

"So much the worse for you, then. There are several of us fellows engaged in this sort of business, and I guess you are partners. If that money isn't paid over right away we will swing you up just as sure as you got the money. It is not my money, but my friend from New York innocently became your victim. Now, you'll find yourself a great deal worse victim than he is."

The man protested that the mine wasn't salted.

"Stop that sort of talk," said Fred. "I went down into it and examined it myself. I bought a salted mine once two hundred miles north of here, and the man who sold it to me saved his life by placing several hundred miles of dirt between us."

The miner then said that he could bring a dozen men to testify that he had gathered twenty thousand dollars' worth of gold out of that claim.

"Oh, yes! Your pals will swear to it, of course. You may have done so and got all there was in it, but that the mine was salted any honest miner would swear. However, I'm not going to call upon anybody for that purpose."

"I haven't got the money," said he. "I sent it East."

"All right, then. Tom, have you got any rope or a string of any kind that is strong enough to swing this man up?"

"I've got a piece of lariat in my tent," said Tom.

"Bring it here, then. If you know how to fix a hangman's noose, do so, and if you don't, hand it over to Terry."

Tom soon returned with about fifteen feet of lariat.

Tom had taken part in lynchings in former days and had the hangman's noose fixed up to perfection.

Meanwhile, the fellow's pals were hustling around raising an alarm that the miner was being held up and robbed.

Several miners began running up to see about it.

Middleton, who was a pretty good talker, explained to them that the holdup was only an attempt to get back the money he had been robbed of in buying a salted claim from the old miner.

Any honest miner is always ready to lynch another who sells a man a salted claim, and almost to a man they sung out:

"Then let's swing him up."

"Hold on!" said Fred. "We are not quite ready yet. We want ten thousand dollars out of him."

Then he looked at the man he was holding down and asked him what he was going to do about it.

"I haven't got the money, and if you hang me you'll hang an innocent man."

Several of the other miners then asked if it was really true that the mine had been salted.

"Yes," said Fred. "I went down into it myself and shoveled out a lot of dirt. I don't believe that there ever came as much as an ounce of gold out of that claim. Now, I'll hold him here until some of you go down into the mine and see for yourselves. Every experienced miner ought to know what a salted claim is."

Two men volunteered to go and examine the claim.

Middleton went along to show it to them, and they made a most thorough examination, and both agreed that the mine had been salted.

When they came back and reported it there was almost a unanimous call for a lynching.

One of them took a lariat that Tom had brought back from the tent and put it over the fellow's head as he lay on the ground under Fred.

"Now hold on, boys," said Fred. "We don't want to swing him up before we get back that money."

"I tell you I haven't got the money," the man protested.

"So much the worse for you then. My friend Middleton will lose it and you will lose your life, and you won't be the only one, either. There is a gang of you working together. We have got four of them spotted already. If any one of them knows where you have placed your money he can save your life by producing it."

"Say, Mister," called out one of the honest miners, "we

haven't got much time to wait here, so just let us swing him up and we will go back to our claims."

"All right," said Fred, who rose to his feet.

The man scrambled up to his feet as quick as a flash, but he was disarmed and could do no harm.

"Now, look here," said Fred. "I'll search you to see if you have any little gold pebbles about you; then escort you back to that claim and let you go down into it with a spade. If you can throw out a cent's worth of gold I'll let you go."

The fellow didn't say anything. He saw that he was caught dead to rights, and that there was a gang of angry men around him ready to swing him up; so he turned to one of his pals and asked him if he could lend him ten thousand dollars' worth of gold-dust.

"Yes; I guess I can raise about that much."

"Then you'd better bring it here," said Fred.

The fellow hurried off and was gone about a half hour. Meanwhile the crowd kept gathering.

The prisoner had begun to get the noose over his neck.

"Just let that cravat alone," said Fred.

The man paid no attention to it.

Fred gave it a jerk that drew it so tightly around his neck that he could hardly breathe, but by and by his pal returned with a canvas bag full of gold nuggets.

"Terry, go and have that weighed somewhere," said Fred, and he and Middleton and another went along to see it weighed.

It weighed pretty close to ten thousand dollars in value, so Terry reported, and the bag was handed over to Middleton, who had paid good money for the claim.

"Now, Middleton," said Fred, "are you satisfied?"

"Yes," said Middleton; "I'm satisfied."

Then Fred faced the men who wanted to lynch the villain.

"Now, gentlemen," said Fred, "justice is satisfied. I don't believe in lynching. Just let me make a suggestion to you, and that is to give warning to this man and his pals, who have been selling salted mines with him, to leave the gold field, at least down in this territory, immediately, under penalty of being hanged if they ever show up in these diggings again. What do you say to that?"

"All right," sung out at least twenty of them.

"Do you understand that?" Fred asked the prisoner.

"Yes, but I have other and good claims, and I ought to have a chance to sell them."

"Well, you don't want to sell any more salted claims. The fact is, there isn't a man in this region who would buy any claim from you after the present exposure. If there are any claims here that are worth anything, there are plenty of honest miners here who would look after the sale of them for you and send the money to any point you might designate."

He called on several men in the crowd to undertake the job for him, but they flatly refused, saying they would have nothing to do with salted claims.

"Now, you want to get away just as quick as you can," said Fred, taking the lariat from his neck. "You want to take a straight march. We don't care which way you go,

north, east, west or south, but if you are found in these diggings to-morrow morning, or even a couple of hours from now, up you will swing."

Neither Fred nor Terry dreamed of the number of men who were concerned in salting claims who were connected with him.

They had come around to help the miner out of his trouble, but they found such a formidable array against him that they decided to remain quiet and say nothing.

He started off in a northward direction, and only two men joined him and went with him.

"Terry, who was that you shot at awhile ago?" Fred asked.

"Hanged if I know! I saw a hand pointing a revolver at you just over the top of that knoll, and I fired at it, and I guess that fellow won't do any more scratching with that hand, for his revolver rolled down the knoll and fell at my feet. I picked it up and have it in my pocket now."

A number of miners got around Fred to shake hands with him and congratulate him on his success in compelling the swindler to return his ill-gotten gain.

Whilst talking with them Fred's eyes rested on a miner in the crowd standing off at a little distance who had twice that day tried to sell him a claim, so he looked at him and said:

"Say, Mister, if that claim of yours that you offered me early this morning is not a salted one I'm ready to buy it, if it shows up all right."

"Pard, I sold it about an hour after you refused to take it."

"All right, then. Of course it is not in the market."

"No. It is already disposed of."

"What did you get for it?"

"Twenty thousand dollars."

"Well, you asked me thirty thousand dollars for it."

"Yes, and I would have taken it if you had accepted the offer."

Quite a number of the miners laughed, and Fred remarked:

"I believe you."

Pretty soon the man went away, and another miner came up to Fred, and said:

"Do you know who bought that claim?"

"No, I do not," was the reply.

"Well, whoever it is was badly swindled. When the man commenced sinking his shaft he did get a few particles of gold; but I don't believe it has panned out as much as a thousand dollars since the first stroke of the pick."

"Well, let the man who bought it do the squealing. I hope, though, he has got a bargain."

"I know, though, that he hasn't," said another miner standing by. "for as a general rule, if a mine is panning out profitably it cannot be bought cheap. The miner works on it easily, expecting every minute to strike it rich."

"Say, if he is a claim salter you had better go to the claim he has sold and see the purchaser about it. A

miner of experience always knows if a mine is salted, after a slight investigation."

Several miners went to the claim, led by the fellow who talked so suspiciously about it.

A little investigation showed that the mine had been salted. The salters had been pretty liberal in scattering the gold about.

The owner soon learned his loss, and he became almost frantic about it.

Several miners went with him in search of the swindler. He was tracked about two miles up through the gold fields, and was found talking with a miner who was extremely anxious to sell his claim.

The purchaser, with his pistol cocked, got the drop on him, and said:

"It is death, or the return of my money."

The miner to whom the other was talking drew his revolver, and said:

"If you shoot my friend I'll finish you."

Another miner retorted:

"And I'll finish you!"

There were four men facing revolvers.

The fellow who had bought the salted mine was a greenhorn, so far as the mining business was concerned, but he was a bad man to fool with; in fact, he was a shooter, and said afterward that he had killed two men within the last year.

His victimizer protested that the mine was not salted.

"Never mind. We have inspected it, and we know that it has been salted; so if you don't begin shelling out I'll blow your brains out when I count five," and he began counting.

When he had counted three the man said:

"Hold on! I'll give you back the money."

"All right; just shell out."

The man, right under the muzzle of the revolver in the hands of his victim, opened his red flannel shirt and unbuckled a money belt from around his waist.

As he did so he looked his victim straight in the eyes, as if waiting to catch him looking elsewhere; but the fellow was too sharp for him.

He noticed the man's hand clutch the handle of his revolver while unbuckling his belt.

"Look out, now!" he warned. "If you attempt to draw that revolver it will be the last time you will ever touch it."

All the same the fellow drew the belt from around his waist and dangled it before his victim's eyes.

The fellow couldn't help looking at it, for it was fat with the contents stuffed in it.

Quick as a flash the other fellow whipped out his revolver and fired.

The bullet grazed the fellow's side just enough to make it bring a copious flow of blood, but the next moment his claim fired and shot the swindler.

"You played that trick pretty well, old fellow," he remarked, "but you lost," and he picked up the belt, which had fallen to the ground.

"Look here," said the dead man's friend, who was sitting at his claim. "You had better count the contents of that belt. All you are entitled to is the money you paid him."

"How much are you entitled to?" the fellow asked.

"None at all. I know his family, and will send the balance to them."

"I'll do the sending myself. Kindly give the address of his family."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW FRED AND TERRY STRUCK GOLD.

The miner refused to give the address of his friend's family, and threatened to charge the man with highway robbery if he took more than he had paid for the claim.

The man looked at him, and said:

"Look here, I didn't give him all the money I had. I have some yet. I'll bet you a thousand dollars against a ten dollar bill, that you are sitting now over a salted claim and trying to sell it."

Several miners had come up on hearing the shot.

"I'll take the bet," said the man.

"All right. Put up your ten dollars, and I'll put up a thousand," and he pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and began counting them out.

Just then Tom Mason came up, trailing a man whom he suspected of being a mine salter.

As soon as he saw him the man with the money belt called to him to hold the stakes.

"All right," said Tom, and he held out his hand for the money.

The man let him have it.

"Now put up your ten dollars," said he to the miner.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I haven't got that much money with me."

"No; you are just dead broke and have salted your claim and want to sell it. Now, I'll give any man ten dollars to go down into this claim and examine it, and tell the truth about it."

The other man threatened to shoot any man that went down into his claim without his consent.

The other miners immediately seized him, disarmed him, and two of them went down and examined the claim.

They found about fifty dollars worth of loose gold scattered about in a way that told at first glance that it had been salted. But to make sure they used pick and spade, and when they came up again they pronounced it a salted claim. The miners, enraged at the frequency of that sort of thing, got a rope and swung him up.

That evening criers were sent out all over the diggings, calling for a meeting of honest miners to discuss what steps to take to punish the salters.

Nearly a thousand miners gathered in front of the tent that covered a big saloon.

Fred and Terry were on hand, and some of the miners recognized them, and began calling for both of them.

Fred saw that the honest miners were ripe for mischief, and that a great deal of nerve and caution would be necessary to prevent a general lynching in the camp.

He spoke eloquently, and the miners listened with the deepest interest.

They recognized him as an orator and a level-headed young man.

"My friends," said he, "there is no sort of doubt that there are many salted claims in these diggings. Of course no experienced miner can be fooled by any of them, but there are newcomers arriving every hour in the day, all eager to make their fortunes. They are astounded at the number of good, well paying claims that are offered them, and they are so anxious to buy that they don't stop to think of the risk they are running. We want to put a stop to it, and I suggest that we adopt this resolution:

"Resolved, that from and after this date any man caught offering a salted claim for sale shall, on proof of guilt, be hanged instantly."

A great shout of approval went up from the crowd.

"The motion is carried," said Fred, "and now, my friends, let me advise you to be moderate and sure. Don't go about suspecting and accusing men, but just wait till one of the villains sells a salted claim. Then take him out and hang him. Now, my pard and myself were out a few years ago, two or three hundred miles north of here in the silver diggings. A man salted a claim and sold it to us. He was shrewd enough to salt it down deep, and we dug down fully three feet and found what we thought was pay dirt. Some of the pals of the villain circulated the report that we had bought a salted mine. We soon found it out, but our pride revolted at the idea of its being known that we were such easy marks; so we decided to keep on digging and bragging that we were getting good pay dirt. Other miners, who had heard how we had been victimized, came around to look and laugh at us. By and by my pard struck a big silver nugget that weighed forty pounds with all the dirt washed off it. The men who salted the mine had neglected to dig deep enough. We kept on digging, and struck two more big nuggets, and it proved to be the best find in the whole region. Men came along and offered us big money for our claim, and, after getting more than fifty thousand dollars out of the claim we sold it for double that amount. We afterward had the satisfaction of seeing other nuggets brought out."

"You didn't salt it, eh?" sung out a big miner.

"No, sir. The purchaser got a larger nugget out of it than we did. From laughing at us, every miner in the diggings began laughing at the man who sold us the claim, and they made life a burden to him and his pals. They were so ashamed of themselves that they lay dead drunk for nearly a week. When they got over the spree every miner in the diggings called them 'salt,' and they soon left the diggings altogether. And I've never seen a man

yet who knew what become of them. Now, my friends, I want you to hear my partner, who can tell you some things that I think will interest you."

With that he introduced Terry, and for half an hour Terry kept them roaring with laughter.

It was a rough crowd, but they were as fond of a good story as most refined people; so he gave Sam Innes' famous recitation of the country swain, and fully five hundred revolvers were fired up in the air, which was one of their ways of showing their appreciation of a good story.

Several men were hit on the head by the bullets as they came down.

They simply jumped, laughed, and the merriment went on.

When Terry wanted to stop they kept yelling at him: "Go on!"

He related several more stories.

Several miners then offered resolutions of thanks, which they were obliged to listen to. They voted Fred the finest orator they had ever heard, and Terry the funniest. Then, of course, they must pledge the health of the two orators in a more tangible way, the wine cup.

Fred had to get up on the log and state that they were total abstainers; that they had kept alive and well as long as they had by keeping away from strong drink.

When they returned to their tents Middleton, Ellsworth and Brown spent nearly half the night laughing at things Terry said in his speech.

"I think it was the funniest thing I ever heard in my life," remarked Middleton.

"Yes," said Brown, "and it is the best thing that ever happened for us. It put the crowd in good humor, and it made a friend of every honest miner in the camp."

"Yes," said Fred. "Terry is good at that. One who makes the crowd laugh always wins. While he was speaking I was watching the faces of the miners, and I saw men who kept scowling all the time, but occasionally he forced a smile in spite of them. I'm quite sure that I could go among them and pick out a score of claim salters."

"I'm sure I could," added Terry: "but we've got them on the run. The whole camp has threatened to swing up the next one caught in the business, and that has given those villains a fright that they won't get over soon."

"Now let me tell you something about that," said Fred. "Probably very few of the claim salters believe that the men meant it when they voted for it, and the business will go on just the same until a few of them are strung up. Even in the best sections of the country villains take desperate chances. In the cities the burglar knows what the law is, yet he will enter houses and steal. When a man has dug a hole pretty deep in the ground and fails to find any pay dirt, the temptation to salt it and catch a tenderfoot is almost irresistible. By the way, Middleton, you want to hide that bag of dust in a safe place."

"I've already got it in a belt around my waist," remarked Middleton.

"Yes, that is a pretty safe place to carry it; but you

"don't want to place yourself where you can be knocked out and the dust taken away from you before you can recover. Always keep with the crowd."

"That is what I am going to do. Those villains were pretty well supplied. Instead of giving me back the money I paid in they've got that concealed somewhere, and it shows that they have been doing a pretty good business."

"Yes, there are several miners who bought salted claims and never found it out. They were under the impression that the vein of gold had run out."

"Well, the next man who sells me a salted claim," remarked Middleton, "I'm just going to get the drop on him, and if he does not return the money I will open fire on him."

"I'll tell you a better way than that," said Fred, "and that is not to buy any salted claim. Buy no claims at all until Terry and I, or Tom here have first examined it. None of them can salt a claim so thoroughly that I can't discover it within ten minutes after I get a few spadeful of earth out of it."

"How do they manage to do it?" Ellsworth inquired.

"Why, they'll get several ounces of small particles of gold and dig up a lot of earth, sprinkle it in the bottom of the shaft, then sprinkle the particles of gold about in it and cover it up. Then they tramp it down until it is hard, so as to make the impression that it is the solid earth that you find the gold in. But it would take a pile driver to pack the earth so hard that a man can't tell the difference between that and the earth that has been once dug up. The first salted claim I ever investigated was the one Terry and I bought up in the silver diggings. Then I made them a study, and I guess it will take a pretty sharp fellow to fool me again."

A few days later Ellsworth was offered a very tempting prize, judging from what the owner had said about it.

The owner of the claim brought four miners to swear that he had gotten fifty thousand dollars worth of gold out of it.

That seemed to be pretty good evidence that the mine was valuable.

The man wanted fifty thousand dollars for it.

Ellsworth told him that he would give the half of that for it if the owner would consent to let Fearnot and Olcott examine it thoroughly.

"Look here," said the owner, "I don't want to have anything to do with those fellows."

"Why, what is the matter with them?"

"Why, they have created more disturbances in these diggings than any other men who have ever been here. You can let any of these gentlemen, though, go down and examine it for you. They are old, experienced miners."

"That's all right. I don't know them personally, but I do know Fearnot and Olcott—knew them back in New York. I am not doubting the word of your friends in the least, but it is a matter of business with me. If Fred and Terry say the claim is all right I'll take it at twenty-five

thousand dollars. If they don't I won't have anything to do with it."

"Well, I won't let them go down into my claim. If they should make a mistake and say it is salted it would raise an alarm, and I'd be swung up to the nearest tree ten minutes later."

"All right. I won't buy any claim in these diggings unless those friends of mine, whose word is sufficient with me, have a chance to examine it."

"Then it's no trade," said the owner.

An hour or two later Ellsworth called Fred's and Terry's attention to the claim and the offer he made for it, on condition that they were permitted to examine it.

"That's right," said Fred. "Were he an honest miner, he would very readily consent for any miner in these diggings to examine his claim. Now let me tell you what I think about this business. I think that all the gold in these diggings runs in a certain direction in the vicinity where the pay dirt is being found. I've been looking around, and there isn't a claim yielding pay dirt down below a certain line."

"I have noticed that, too," said Terry.

"I haven't heard of a claim being offered for sale," said Fred, "on this side of the creek half a mile above here. Now, I propose that we all go out prospecting, for you are not going to be able to buy a claim that will give up its purchase money."

"Well," said Middleton, "neither Ellsworth nor Brown nor myself know any more about prospecting for gold than the veriest greenhorn that ever came west of the Mississippi. We came out with the intention of buying a claim."

"Well, you have a better chance to find pay dirt by digging for it than by buying a hole in the ground. If a man strikes good pay dirt he is not going to sell it at a low price, for it is natural for him to think there is a great quantity right under his feet; so he is going to dig for it, and he is not going to sell it unless he can get a fortune for it. Now let Ellsworth and Brown stay here and take care of the tent, while Terry and I, with Tom and Middleton, go up across the creek and prospect for ourselves."

"Well, where will we come in if you find any pay dirt?" Brown and Ellsworth asked.

"We will all share alike," said Fred. "If we find pay dirt we will let you know, so each one can stake out a claim close by."

They agreed to that; so the party of four started out to spend the day prospecting.

They had to go a pretty good distance, for miners had taken the same view of the locality that Fred and Terry had, and claims were staked out for a couple of miles along the row of hills beyond the creek, and their owners were vigorously at work in them.

Everywhere they went Fred and Terry were recognized by the miners, and received many pleasant greetings.

They had heard them speak at the massmeeting and were disposed to be very friendly to them.

Whenever they made inquiries as to how their claims were panning out they received frank answers.

At last, up among the hills, Fred and Terry both stopped and gazed at the formation of gullies that had been cut by floods during the rainy seasons.

Fred looked at a place where the hard earth had turned waters rather abruptly, and made big pockets full of sand.

"Terry," said Fred, "here is a chance to find out whether there is any gold in these hills or not. For a number of years great rushing floods have passed through this gulch, and if there is any gold where these waters came from, it has been deposited in these pockets, in sand. Now, let's look for it."

Terry got down into the deep gully and began throwing up spadeful of sand.

After about a dozen spadeful of sand had been thrown out Fred, who was leaning down examining each spadeful, suddenly called to Middleton:

"Just look at that, will you?" pointing to the bright particles of gold that showed up in the last spadeful that was thrown out.

"There is a handful for you."

Tom and Middleton knelt down and gazed at it.

"What is it?" Terry asked, down in the gully.

"Only a handful of the yellow stuff," said Fred. "Just skim off the sand, and you will probably find a quart or two of the stuff down a little deeper."

So Terry knelt down, and with his hands raked away the sand until he found the deposit.

"Here it is! Here it is!" he called out, enthusiastically.

"I don't understand this thing," said Middleton.

"Well, I'll explain to you," said Fred. "This is known among miners as a pocket. It may be several hundred yards, or a quarter of a mile from here where these little particles of gold came from. The heavy rains through the winter cut through the earth and wash great quantities of it down this gully. Being so much heavier than the sand, when it rushes over these holes it sinks to the bottom, and the current takes the earth farther down toward the creek. I've known twenty or thirty thousand dollars worth of gold to be taken out of a hole not bigger than a half bushel measure. It is known as pocket mining."

"Well, let's fill our pockets with it," suggested Middleton.

"All right," laughed Fred.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Terry threw out all the particles of gold that he found in the pocket, till he reached the bottom of it.

"That's all, Fred," he remarked, as he threw out the last spadeful.

"All right," said Fred. "Tom, you follow up the gully and see if you can find another hole filled up with sand. You may be sure that down below the sand you will find more pockets of the yellow stuff. We want to secure everyone of them before anyone else comes along, for a miner who finds one will have the right to claim it."

"Well, what is the matter with my hunting for one myself?" asked Middleton.

"Do so, and when you find it throw out a few spadeful of sand, and that will make it your claim."

In a few minutes all four of them were going up the gully looking for pockets of sand.

Tom soon found a rich one.

He had knowledge enough of the business to know how to find the gold at the bottom of the pocket.

Middleton, though, simply skimmed off a few spadeful of clear sand and threw it out.

Fred found another.

Then Terry, going still higher above, found one, rather small, from which he threw out the sand and filled his pockets full of the yellow metal.

Fred did his own mining, and cleared up the pockets that he found.

When he and Terry had finished up theirs they went to Tom's and Middleton's with them.

Altogether they made a big haul, for their pockets were filled with the fine little yellow grains of gold.

The metal being very heavy, it made a hard pull on their pockets.

Of course Middleton was very much excited.

It was his first experience at mining.

"Now, boys," said Fred, "let's go down to the creek, where this gully empties into it. The waters have been rushing down here for many years, and during that time, with every big rain quantities of gold particles were washed down by it. We want to stake off a claim, for there may be a rich mine near the creek, and probably several pockets between here and there. The higher up we go the smaller the pockets will be. Then we will go back to our tents and empty our pockets. We must be extremely careful, though, not to let it become known to the other miners. I suggest that we take a roundabout way. Go down to the creek and make a detour for about a mile; so if they find out we have found gold they will go back in that direction instead of coming here."

They acted on his suggestions very promptly.

Fred said that he would stay there until they returned, for fear that somebody would come along and begin digging there near the creek.

The other three went back to their headquarters and deposited their findings with Ellsworth and Brown.

Then they returned, and found Fred had uncovered another splendid pocket, containing many thousand dollars' worth of small particles of gold.

"Boys," said he, "this is rich. But how in thunder we are going to get gold from the bottom of the creek is a problem."

"Are you sure there is any here?" Middleton asked.

"Yes, there must be."

"How is it that the current of the creek hasn't washed it away?"

"Because the current isn't strong enough and there isn't elevation enough, for the bed of the creek is pretty much a dead level. You'll find the gold deep down in the sand. The elevation of the hill makes a strong current during a rainstorm; hence it works differently in those gullies."

While they were working it a couple of prospecting miners came along and saw what was going on, and at once they started up the hill looking for pockets.

They found, though, that somebody had been along ahead of them.

Then they rushed down the hill to the creek, but found that Fred had staked the claim clear across the creek; so as to secure the width of it across the bed of the creek.

They had to stake their claims below where the gully emptied into the stream.

Finally one of them asked Fred if he would sell his claim across the bed of the creek.

"Well, I don't know what it is worth," he replied, "for we haven't stuck a spade into the bed of the stream yet; but it's a natural law for the current that has swept down that gully to make gold deposits under the water."

"Well, I'll risk it," said one of the men. "I'll pay you ten thousand dollars for it."

"Why, pard," said Terry, "there may be a hundred thousand dollars worth of gold in there."

"Well, we expect to find gold there, otherwise we would not buy it. But neither you nor I have seen any gold there. It is an even chance."

"Well, you won't charge us with salting it, will you?" laughed Fred.

All of them laughed heartily at the question, and so the trade was made.

They had emptied the pockets for half a mile around the gully, and returned to their camp about dark, having secured during the day about seventy thousand dollars' worth of the yellow metal.

Other miners, the next day, found men working in the bed of the creek and scooping up the great quantities of fine particles of gold imbedded in the sand.

Within twenty-four hours the bed of the creek was being worked for half a mile.

Miners were sinking shafts from the foot of the hill clear up to the top of it.

Soon the claim salters were at work again, as though they had forgotten the threats made at the massmeeting.

One of them had a pistol fight with the salter from whom he had bought his worthless claim, and both were wounded.

Then the honest miners took up the claim salter and hanged him to the limb of a big tree within fifty yards of the claim he had salted.

The other one took to flight, but was caught before he had gone three miles, and was hung up to the nearest tree.

That had a deterring effect on the other men engaged in the same business.

A few days later Brown was offered a claim for ten thousand dollars, the owner of which had made big statements about its yield.

Brown sent for Fred and Terry, to get their advice about the matter.

"Don't touch it," said Fred, "until you have first examined it."

The man promptly told Brown that he could go down in it and examine it to his satisfaction.

"Let this friend of mine go down with me," and he laid his hand on Fred's shoulder.

The would-be seller said that Fred would not be allowed to do so, as he was a maker of trouble.

Fred took a spade and started down, anyhow.

The man drew his revolver and threatened to shoot.

Terry drew his, and said that he could shoot, too.

The miner took to his heels, and a half hour later Fred came up and uttered but one word, and that was "salt."

Brown was indignant.

He started after the fellow, revolver in hand, and aroused a pursuit in which nearly half a hundred miners took part. But the fellow concealed himself in the claim of some friend, and he couldn't be found.

He stayed there all night, and probably got away from the diggings before sunrise.

At last a lot of them conspired together to get rid of Fearnot and Olcott.

Several times about a dozen of them passed the headquarters of Fred and Terry, and looked suspiciously around at them.

But their Winchester rifles were in the tent, and they didn't have the courage to risk an attack.

"Terry, those fellows are evidently trying to catch us alone. Then they'll pick a quarrel with us and open combined fire on us."

"I was thinking about that myself, Fred; so we will all keep together."

"Say, boys, one of my wagons came in last night with a load of mutton. What's the matter with us gathering up our treasure and going back with it to-morrow? It will be empty, you know, and when we get tired of walking we can all ride by turns. What dust we've got will be safe there at the house until we can get it down to the bank at Tucson, where we can ship it east, or sell it to the bank at its bullion value."

"Let's do that," said Middleton, "and we can make the division at the ranch."

It was agreed to, and Tom notified his two wagon drivers to be ready to start before daylight the next morning, as he was intending to go back with them.

He didn't tell them that Fred, Terry and the others were going with them.

He wanted to keep the fact that they were going to leave the gold fields a secret, and thus prevent the mine salters from combining to intercept them.

So before daylight the next morning they arose, folded up their blankets and their tents, put them into the wagon, and before sunrise they were nearly ten miles away from the diggings.

It was a long ride over a rough country, but the very early start they made enabled them to make the distance by traveling nearly ten miles after sunset.

Of course they had met miners going and coming, for there was a rush to the mining regions all over the West. Marvelous stories of riches to be found there had gone out all over the country.

Tom told them that night to do their best to keep concealed from the shepherds on his sheep ranch the story of their success.

"If they find out that we have returned with seventy or eighty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust, I'm afraid nearly all of my men would desert the ranch to hunt for gold."

They agreed to keep it entirely dark, but it was all useless.

The mine salters, who were looking for a chance to wipe out Fred and Terry, inquired of the butcher as to what had become of them.

"They've left the diggings," he replied.

"Have they gone east?"

"Yes, but I guess they'll stop at Mason's sheep ranch to rest up awhile and divide their winnings."

"How much did they get?"

"Oh, I guess each one has got a small fortune."

On hearing that they entered into a conspiracy to go out and attack the ranch, secure the treasure and disperse.

Every wagon driver that went from the ranch to the diggings heard the story of Fearnot's party having secured a fortune, and that they had taken it to the ranch.

About half the shepherds of the place resigned their positions on the ranch that they might be free to go out to the gold fields.

Tom begged hard for them to wait until he could secure others to take their places, but they had the gold fever red hot, and wouldn't wait a day; so he paid them off and they left.

Tom sent another shepherd in several directions to hire other men in their places, but for several weeks those that remained on the ranch had to do double work, though Tom told them that he would give them double pay.

He was always just to his men. Fred and Terry volunteered to help them out.

The other New Yorkers would have been in the way; so they acted as guards for the treasure concealed in the house, and they always had their Winchesters ready for instant use.

They had suspected that the mine salters would combine to attack the place and secure the prize, but it seemed that the villains on second thought gave up the job.

In due time they mounted their horses and rode down to Tucson, where they sold their gold bullion and shipped their horses eastward.

THE END.

Read "FRED FEARNOT AND THE OFFICE BOY; or, BOUND TO BE THE BOSS," which will be the next number (285) of "Work and Win."

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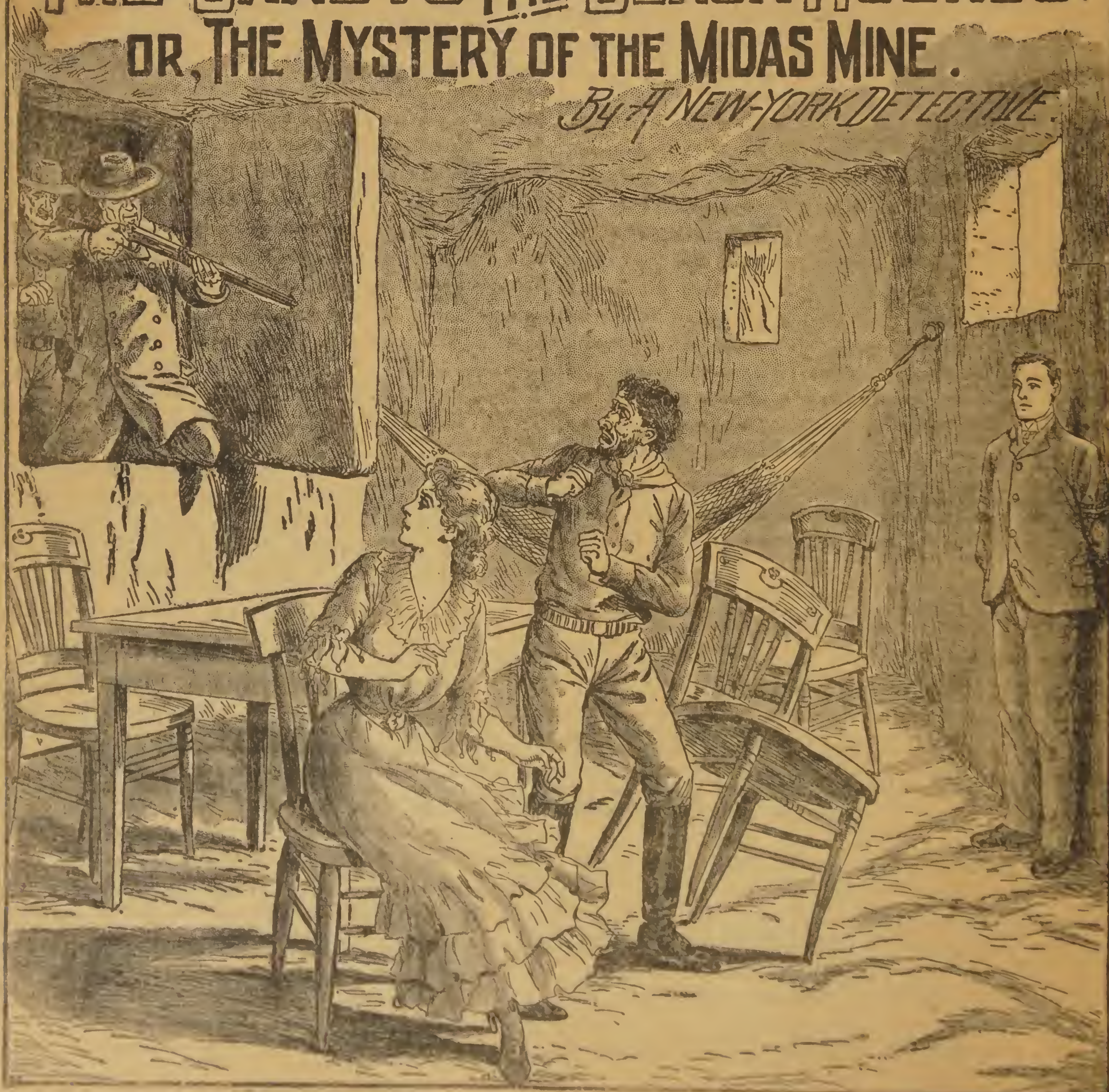
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